

**Locating Subjects, Disrupting Intervention:
Youth empowerment and agricultural
modernisation in Serbia**

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Mandatory Layout of Declaration/Statements

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STATEMENT 1

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of international intervention that takes as its analytical starting point the subjectivities of those who are supposed to reap the benefits of liberal intervention projects.

The thesis combines (1) a focus on the connection between subjectivity and liberal power offered by governmentality approaches with (2) an ethnographic orientation that problematises any bounded conception of subjectivity. The ethnographic methodology developed in the thesis is employed to explore two fields of intervention in Serbia: agricultural governance and non-formal youth education.

This reorientation engenders analytical disruptions to the concepts of international intervention and liberal governmentality in three ways. First, it uncovers subject positions more varied than a universal *homo oeconomicus*. Second, it shows that power can be simultaneously violent and silencing as well as dispersed and productive. Third, the thesis points to fields of visibility far wider than those imagined in project documents of interveners. In theorising from these disruptions, the thesis argues that the concept of intervention itself stands at the heart of our analytical problems: it essentialises conceptions of local and international and it occludes the coevalness of spaces and processes.

In the end, the thesis presents *politics of improvement* as a more productive way of exploring these encounters that seek to build peace and democracy around the world. This approach advocates engagement with lived experience not only as an interesting ethnographic travelogue, but as a prompt for a more fundamental rethinking of how power and inequality make international politics. As such, the thesis contributes both to the scholarship on international interventions, and to the ongoing project of reorienting IR's analytical and methodological frameworks to include subjects and perspectives missing from the discipline.

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Part I

Introduction

In June 2015, I travelled to Istanbul to attend my first fieldwork trip—a week-long event for youth from Yugoslavia’s successor states under the name *Youth for Peace*.¹ This small peacebuilding intervention sought to deal with both the legacy and causes of the 1990s wars that followed the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The event’s goals were seemingly simple: to “raise the future leaders who are respectful towards diversity.”² I was there because I was interested in how these “soft” international interventions in which there is no military and no coercion are experienced by participants, in their everyday working. The specific project in Istanbul was an international effort between a Turkish and a British university, and it specifically targeted young people that I was considering as one of the policy fields I might engage for the rest of my fieldwork. Yet, I was also eligible for participation as a young person “affected by war.”³

In this Introduction, I will use my research experience from *Youth for Peace* to explore the trouble with interventions—their aims, their practices, and the ways of studying them—because it is precisely these experiences of being *intervened upon* that are missing from current accounts of interventions. In so doing, I will indicate the main questions that the thesis asks and why. First, I will situate the issues of the governing *intent* of these projects and their *reception* within literature on governmentality, the local turn, and ethnographic methodologies. I will then summarise the research puzzle and the settings in which I pursued it. Finally, the last section of this chapter will illustrate the main argument of the thesis, briefly present the structure of the thesis, and introduce some limitations to the questions asked.

I Intent: Intervention, governmentality and the local

The *Youth for Peace* event is held every year at the same university in Turkey. It aims to showcase “pioneering work in a new age of conflict resolution” and traces its origin to “the idea of dissecting the roots of prejudice and bringing together communities, that have historically experienced conflict from regional dynamics.”⁴ In 2015, it focused on the theme

¹ All persons, events, and organisations in the thesis have been anonymised.

² Fieldwork journal, Call for Applications for *Youth for Peace*.

³ Fieldwork journal, Call for Applications for *Youth for Peace*.

⁴ Fieldwork journal, Call for Applications for *Youth for Peace*.

What Happened to Yugoslavia? Participation was limited to young people between 20 and 30 years of age from former Yugoslav republics, and it specifically targeted “[c]andidates that have first-hand been *affected by the conflict* or have close family that has [sic] experienced the war.”⁵ The one-day conference invited renowned experts on the region, and it was followed by a three-day conflict resolution workshop led by Dr Ben Howard, a United Kingdom (UK)-based conflict resolution expert.

The workshop embodied the types of interventions that this thesis studies: there is no military presence, there are no challenges to sovereignty. On the contrary, the transformations are supposed to arrive from the bottom up by accomplishing seemingly modest goals like individual reconciliation and personal development. But despite their micro targets and humble means, these interventions are paradoxically ambitious—while the five days in Istanbul with ordinary youth might seem banal, the aim was nothing less than helping regional transformation towards peace imagined as democracy and free markets.

These types of encounters stand in contrast to the more orthodox understanding of international intervention as a coercive interference that has as its aim the prevention of atrocities.⁶ As the *Youth for Peace* week shows, both scholarship and practice expanded this definition significantly in the last decades. Today interventions involve a variety of acts and goals: they build peace, states, democracies, and economic development with tools ranging from political conditionality to personal skill building. And, as we shall see next, these transformations are meant to begin from the subjectivities of participants themselves.

While the most obvious objective of *Youth for Peace* was moving beyond conflict by educating a new generation of leaders, the workshop also had therapeutic and self-improvement elements. It specifically invited “youth that was [sic] personally affected by the conflict to share their experience and help [them] with analysing the conflict and overcoming it through the Workshop.” We were further enticed by a combination of “inspiring speeches, panel discussions as well as entrepreneurial talks” to be held at the conference. Moreover, the three-day workshop was facilitated by Dr Howard who was to “mentor young leaders coming from former Yugoslav countries.” These young leaders, with the help of Dr Howard, were to “engage in an interactive, intensive workshop aiming to overcome the dimensions of prejudice currently entrenched in regional dynamics.”⁷ We were obviously doing multiple

⁵ Emphasis in the original.

⁶ Welsh, ‘Introduction’, 3. This emphasis on force and coercion are now mostly reserved for debates around humanitarian intervention. See the rest of the edited volume for more on this. Welsh, *Humanitarian Intervention and International Relations*.

⁷ Fieldwork journal, Call for Applications for *Youth for Peace*.

things at the same time: overcoming prejudice and conflict that we carry as a birth-right from “post-conflict” countries (it was unclear whether this prejudice was the cause or the outcome of the 1990s wars), we were building entrepreneurial skills and networks that will enable us to use them, and we were becoming “the future leaders who are respectful towards diversity.”

There is a striking idiosyncrasy in the temporal imagination of these goals—we are there because we *already* are the solution, but we are also imagined needing to undertake a transformation to be able to *become* that solution.⁸ In this transformation, we are supposed to shed the shackles of “entrenched prejudice” and become the leaders that we appeared to already be in our application forms. We were at the same time treated as both the *cause* and the *cure* to the quagmire of 1990s wars. In addition to this curious conception of our agency in peace-making, the workshop mixed in narratives of entrepreneurship, contacts, networking and skills that will enhance our personal future prospects. In the *Call for Applications*, peace seemed to arrive with entrepreneurship; progress with competition in the market; and the “good life” in the Balkans with embracing ideals that are seemingly universal.

This ambiguity of aims points to a more general bewilderment around the goals of this comprehensive project that flew us all to a mini-holiday in Istanbul. In the introductory session, people listed differing reasons for participation—gaining skills, free holidays, learning about different historical perspectives that notoriously diverge in the region’s history textbooks, making friends and contacts, exchanging knowledge and ideas, developing CVs. In itself, this was not surprising: the notorious “lack of opportunities in the region” and the deteriorating economic situation, made both travelling and experiencing new styles of education an exciting prospect.

In my notes after the workshop, I paraphrased the conclusion of our closing discussion, “what is the point?” Is it to learn “what happened to Yugoslavia?” and reach some objective truth that should guard against repeating the past? Is it to think about how not to let it happen again? Are we aiming for skills-building for our professional careers to tap into the popular connection between economic development and peace? Is it skills for civil society, the regional dear of international donors, that we are supposed to develop and thus “build capacity”? Or are we there to holiday in Turkey?

In trying to figure out *the point* of the week, it is useful to contextualise the workshop within larger narratives of international interventions. Interventions denote a wide range of

⁸ For more on the temporal peculiarities of programs that seek to empower youth, see Eliasoph, *Making Volunteers*, chap. 4.

practices, mostly of various Western or Northern organisations and their partners, undertaking an array of projects and programs to produce, or fund the production of, peace, democracy, and development through political, economic, and social engineering around the world.⁹ Here, I want to emphasise three defining characteristics of intervention that unify the existing literature: the *agents* of intervention, its *acts*, and its overarching *goal*.

In accounts of intervention that are found across peacebuilding, statebuilding, democracy promotion, and development literatures, it is implied that the *agents* of intervention are “someone else” than those who are supposed to reap the benefits of the intervention.¹⁰ This difference is usually understood in nation-state terms: the intervener is either a foreign power, or the under-defined “international community.” Even when the transformation is supposed to be happening within *local* actors, like during *Youth for Peace*, it is the *international* community that needs to act as a catalyst for the desired change.

Besides the agents of intervention, the second defining feature is the *act* itself. It is understood that the intervention proceeds in what John MacMillan refers to as “discrete acts.”¹¹ Such a vision implies practices that are ordered within pre-defined fields of action and time. This is why most intervention studies, including my fieldwork in Istanbul, rely on specific programs implemented by the international actors described above. Choosing a field of action is often the first step of approaching intervention, both in practice and scholarly analysis.

Third, these interventions seemingly have as their goal the promotion of liberalism itself. This is captured most clearly in the liberal peace literature that gathers both problem-solving and critical voices around the project of building peace understood as “democracy, rule of law, and market economics.”¹² But under these three simple concepts, a spate of aims emerge: free elections, transparent institutions, respect for human rights, limited state, a functioning and strong civil society, privatisation of public goods and institutions, rollback of the welfare state, the deregulation of capital and labour markets, and many more.¹³ Even

⁹ Throughout the thesis, I will often refer to power-centres as “the West,” even though I realise both the more complicated topographies of power that prevent simple geographical division, and the importance of the North-South division. I do so to reference generally those countries that are usually seen as having the will and the skill to intervene, and since in Serbia they are termed “the West,” I also keep this formulation.

¹⁰ For example, even in Audra Mitchell’s definition of intervention as a “wide array of action through which humans try to change the trajectories of events by ‘acting into them,’” we are still working within *international intervention* as the title of the book. Mitchell, *International Intervention in a Secular Age*, 3.

¹¹ MacMillan, ‘Intervention and the Ordering of the Modern World’, 1041.

¹² Campbell, Chandler, and Sabaratnam, ‘Introduction: The Politics of Liberal Peace’, 1.

¹³ Selby, ‘The Myth of Liberal Peace-Building’.

though the idea of intervention as a coherent liberal program is contested, as we will discuss in Chapter 1, there is a wide understanding that such an idea exists.¹⁴

Youth for Peace then presents one such international intervention. It is imagined as an *international* effort to change *local* circumstances, as an *act* it is confined to one week, and its specified outcomes should contribute to a *liberal* transformation of the region. Yet it is offered without coercion, involves ordinary people, and it is relatively modest in scope when compared to NATO bombings or to organised UN peacekeeping missions.

In these projects, it has by now become common sense to focus on local individuals—in this case, the 30 young people that travelled to Istanbul—as both the cause and the cure for the problem at hand. The problem, it has become obvious, cannot be easily pin-pointed: any peace effort must be supported by economic strengthening, any economic program has to consider social characteristics, and every project in the end has to be both accepted and enacted in the individuals themselves. Hence such strangely simultaneous targeting of the *Youth for Peace* program as both specific and general: we will share our experiences and heal, we will gain skills and thus become economically empowered, we will learn to be more open, and we will thus save our region: economically, socially, and politically. Without us, there can simply be no change.

This idea of empowering individuals to take change in their own hands captures what is now known in literature as the local turn.¹⁵ As top-down interventions proved unsustainable and often had negative effects, the local turn emerged as the alternative. If interventions failed because the interveners lack the authority to intervene, why not give ownership to those who already have the social capital and legitimacy? If interventions fail because their international designs are insensitive to specific local contexts, what better solution than to transfer the agency of transformation to those having all the context-specific skills and knowledge acquired by living there?¹⁶ Hence, ideas like participation,

¹⁴ For example, Selby. In this article, Selby finds agreement on this “liberal” goal and aims of peacebuilding across the critical/problem solving divide. However, in the article itself, Selby points out that this is a misleading analytical starting point because peacebuilding interventions themselves are a lot less liberal—they are still “quasi realist” in that they are shaped by geopolitics and “states, power and strategy within world politics” (p.59). I make a reference to liberalism not because I “buy into” the seemingly coherently liberal goals and practices of interventions, but because the representative democracy and free markets underpin and were presented as the goals of the projects that I observed. Here, I do not examine their “hidden” aims, “illiberal” practices, nor “varied” effects—I come back to these in a manner significantly different than that of Selby in Chapter 6.

¹⁵ Even though the questioning of such terms as “the local” animates the whole thesis, I refrain from using quotation marks around them to ease reading.

¹⁶ Kappler, ‘The Dynamic Local’; MacGinty and Richmond, ‘The Local Turn in Peace Building’; Richmond, ‘Peace Formation and Local Infrastructures for Peace’.

empowerment, local ownership, and an overall valorisation of the local came to be. Healing cannot be accomplished by the interveners coming to Yugoslavia and doing it *for* us. On the contrary, the job of the interveners is to “help us to help ourselves.”

Besides shifting the conceptualisation of agency away from the international and onto the local, this also implies a more general change in the rationality that guides intervention. The week in Istanbul was not to only teach us new skills, but to enact a transformation in how we relate to ourselves and those around us—it sought to shape us as subjects, to affect subjectivity. This explains the wide array of goals that range from helping us overcome personal trauma to offering entrepreneurial and business skills—if we thoroughly change as people, every aspect of the social life that we make will accordingly transform. It thus becomes hard to separate practices of peacebuilding, statebuilding, democracy promotion, and development—the expansion of goals and tools to achieve them necessarily blurs the lines between different projects that seek to improve the lives of whole populations.¹⁷

This all-encompassing transformation opens up the consideration of interventions as pursuits of a particular form of government in the Foucauldian sense—a concern with life itself that transcends the boundaries between social, political, and economic spheres examined around the concept of governmentality. This “concern for life,” or “government,” was the topic that Michel Foucault pursued in his lectures in 1978 and 1979—*Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*.¹⁸ His ideas on government help us make sense of “the point” of the *Youth for Peace* workshop.

In talking about government, Foucault invoked the basic assumption that all government is “economic government.” In this formulation, governing is expanded to include governing oneself, others, souls, children, etc. “Economic,” on the other hand, refers to government “in the best possible way” and moves from the realm of the household where it was the father who governed the family in the best possible way, to the modern state that governs its population. In this rendition, “to govern” means to be responsible for every aspect of life: welfare, happiness, health, etc., just as the father was responsible for all parts of the household.¹⁹ With this view, it becomes easier to understand how the Istanbul event was concerned with such varied aspects of our lives: mental health, personal values, business skills, and career prospects. It was a small illustration of what it means to seek to *govern* life

¹⁷ Williams, ‘Development, Intervention, and International Order’; Woodward, ‘The Long Intervention’; Siani-Davies, *International Intervention in the Balkans since 1995*.

¹⁸ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

¹⁹ Foucault, ‘Governmentality’, 89–99.

as a whole. Accordingly, this thesis will use Foucault's concept of governmentality to inquire further in the relationship between interventions and subjectivities they engage.

Governmentality does not imply only the expansion of the fields of government, but it also specifically makes sense of how individuals govern themselves—power here is not coercive, but a productive effect that creates subjects within the matrices of permissible actions and thought. In its famous formulation, it is the “conduct of conduct.”²⁰ More than helping us understand the rationality of these interventions, governmentality then provides a specific critique of the local turn that uncovers how the focus on individuals, rather than institutions, is a subtler, but a vastly more intrusive tool of intervention. Instead of targeting institutions and structures that might bring economic growth and peace, interventions today focus on individual behaviours, values, and thoughts of the people who they are supposed to be helping.²¹ The nurturing and empowerment in projects like the one in Istanbul are far from the emancipation and freedom of liberal theory: they are moulding subjects to voluntarily fit their lives into preconceived ideas about what freedom is. In other words, power is still here, but it is a more sophisticated form of liberal discipline that uses the subject's sense of self, rather than institutions, in achieving the goal of governing.

Governmentality as a form of rule raises two points that will be pursued throughout the thesis. First, it emphasises the dangers of practices that seemingly promote freedom and emancipation. Despite the recent controversies surrounding Foucault's own political positions, I agree with those who see governmentality primarily as a critique of (neo)liberalism.²² A good example is Barbara Cruikshank's early work on democracy in which she showed how empowerment in the form of democratic citizenship is not a solution to contemporary problems, but in fact a “strategy of government.” In her account, democracy, far from being the best way to organise politics, is a form of government that results in a “faceless power” that is impossible to find, or contest, because it is at the same time everywhere and nowhere.²³ From this Foucauldian perspective then, all action might not be bad, but it is definitely dangerous.²⁴

²⁰ The phrase was popularised by Gordon's use in *The Foucault Effect*. Gordon, ‘Governmental Rationality: An Introduction’, 2.

²¹ A clear formulation can be found in Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*, 42.

²² Here I refer to public debates on the articles that preceded the translation of Zamora, Behrent, and Foucault, *Foucault and Neoliberalism*.

²³ Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower*, 15.

²⁴ Foucault, ‘On the Genealogy of Ethics’.

Second, governmentality is ultimately interested in the relationship between capitalism and forms of rule—it was developed by Foucault to specifically examine the rise of liberal rule, and its transformation under market rationality to neoliberalism. Although Foucault wrote against his contemporary Marxists and their reliance on economic determinism, *neoliberal* governmentality is very much based on a market rationality that governs conduct.²⁵ As Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval emphasise, this market rationality becomes crucial in the way we relate to ourselves—as a personal enterprise, and to others—always in relation of competition.²⁶ Yet these personal, subjective relations—economisation of life itself—are defining features of common political life.²⁷ In the words of Wendy Brown, the demos itself is being undone by this neoliberal reason that replaces the political character of liberal democracy with an economic one. This eradicates institutions, cultures, and citizens needed for both liberal and radical democratic imaginaries.²⁸

Governmentality thus changes the way we interpret the meaning of the local turn. Instead of being a technique of emancipation, the local turn becomes a governmental technique that relocates discussion from the political issues of distribution and power, to matters of individual behaviour.²⁹ It becomes a part of what James Ferguson has famously termed the ‘anti-politics machine’.³⁰ Neoliberalism then stops being limited to a culture, system, a policy framework, or an ideology. It is seen as a “multi vocal and contradictory phenomena” that encompasses both “political discourses about the nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate government of individuals from distance.”³¹ Thus, using

²⁵ Here, I draw on three lectures from *Birth of Biopolitics* that define the move from liberalism to neoliberalism (Lectures Four, Five, and Six). In short, neoliberalism changes the way we understand the market, the state, and the subject(s). First, the market does not only limit the state, but becomes its “organising and regulating principle” (p. 116). Second, the subject is understood as a bearer of responsibility, rather than rights (I will come back to this in Chapter 2). And third, government then is not “a counterpoint [...] between society and economic processes. It has to intervene on society as such, in its fabric and depth” (p. 145). See note 31 below for more on understanding neoliberalism as an ideology, culture, policy, or governmentality.

²⁶ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 320.

²⁷ It is important to note that economisation here does not automatically imply monetization—these different spheres of life like family, education, or relationships are not necessarily monetized (even though this is an important function of neoliberalism in other spheres), but they are subjected to the model of the market that “configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*.” Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 31.

²⁸ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*.

²⁹ Chandler, “‘Human-Centred’ Development?” See also the debate between Chandler and Richmond in ‘Contesting Postliberalism’.

³⁰ Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.

³¹ Lerner, ‘Neo-Liberalism’, 6, 21. She sees neoliberalism as a policy framework, ideology, and governmentality, Hilgers distils approaches that see it as a culture, a system, and governmentality, see Hilgers, ‘The Three Anthropological Approaches to Neoliberalism’.

governmentality to examine these projects allows us to better appreciate interventions that blur the lines between economy, society and politics.

Reading that first encounter of my fieldwork along with governmentality literature uncovers important dynamics of projects of peace and development. The agency of change is attached firmly to local subjectivities, while the change implies transformation in how those subjectivities make the social, political, and economic landscape of the region. The added value of Foucauldian governmentality studies here is seeing how these seemingly micro and less intrusive techniques function along with increasingly comprehensive views on what good life is: visions of economics, politics, and subjective technologies come together in an ideal pursued by contemporary interventions. Governmentality helps us pry open the subtle techniques that are seemingly devoid of power and function with praise-worthy ideals of emancipation, empowerment, and ownership. It is these governmentalised individuals, who are supposedly being emancipated, transformed and empowered, that the following pages focus on. This approach leads to some of the question that will be tackled subsequently: How are the local subjects imagined? How is their transformation supposed to happen? What kind of people are they supposed to become and why? Through which practices is the transformation encouraged?

However, my questions do not stop there. Noticeably, all the above questions are oriented towards the governing *intent*—they probe the rationalities of these projects and ask how the projects are imagined, advertised, and rationalised. During my time in Istanbul, it became obvious that the *intent* and the *reception* of governing are intimately connected, but vastly different.³²

II Reception: Beyond the local and governmentality

On the last day of the *Youth for Peace* week, we were unexpectedly told that we will participate in something called *Empathy Studio: One question workshop*. One of the facilitators started by saying that “there was an elephant in the room during the week.” We looked at each other confusedly—we had been sharing rooms, meals, transport, exhaustion and excitement all week and we did not think it likely that we missed anything. Yet, the facilitator spoke with confidence as she was telling us that we will be put in pairs (always from different countries) and allowed to ask one question to each other. She elaborated: “There’s an elephant in the room that you’ve avoided the whole time, now you’ll have the opportunity to

³² I borrow the analytical distinction between intent and reception from Hemment, *Youth Politics in Putin’s Russia*.

ask the question that is the elephant in the room.” The instructions were short, but thorough: “We count on you to exercise some self-censorship and not let things get out of control;” “there will be no discussion, you can discuss all day after the workshop;” “you will be filmed, if you prefer your face not to be filmed, we will film your hands and feet.”³³

Examining the intent of the *Empathy Studio* would allow me to analyse it as a “psychosocial intervention” that is criticised by Vanessa Pupavac and Caroline Hughes.³⁴ It would also point to the local as ambiguously positioned as the problem—we bring the elephant, and the solution to the problem—only we can get rid of the elephant. Governmentality sheds lights on how we are not coerced into new behaviour patterns but nurtured into developing them ourselves through self-reflection and devising new ways of seeing ourselves and our relations to others.

However, the critique voiced by my colleagues at the workshop was different. If the goal of the workshop was to create a group, the collective anger that this announcement provoked proved that we really became one—the dissatisfaction was expressed communally, and everyone’s complaints were supported by this group dynamic. To explore these critiques, the thesis moves beyond governing *intention* and delves in the *reception* of these interventions to complicate and build onto these relatively straightforward readings.

The idea of the local as separated from the logics of governing was challenged when participants who studied psychology emphasised that it is dangerous to uncover possible traumas and then not offer the time or the expertise to deal with them. For a moment, the binary dynamic of the unskilled local helped by international experts was overturned. The conceptualisations of us as beneficiaries were questioned. Participants protested that “they did not apply for a ‘healing process’” and compared the exercise to rehab programs that they found insulting. The economic rationalities were both practiced and resisted. Some denounced the marketing goals and pronounced that they will not allow themselves to be used as marketing props. At the same time, others looked forward to adding the resulting video as a line in their entrepreneurial CVs. Moreover, the ways that we were imagined as “Balkan subjects” of peacebuilding were probed: do they assume that we spent a week together while secretly hating each other? Do they expect us to attack each other if only given a chance? Someone shortly summarized the feeling: “I don’t think that we have been dealing with the Balkans, but with the *discourse* on the Balkans. None of us feel very

³³ Fieldwork journal.

³⁴ Hughes and Pupavac, ‘Framing Post-Conflict Societies’; Pupavac, ‘Securing the Community?’

Balkan.”³⁵ The comment captures the problem well. It was obvious that the images of the local and the design for its transformation were present, but none of us “felt very local.”

These challenges require thinking further about the local in interventions and the ways that governmentality literature allows us to deal with the local turn. The literature on the local turn and its categories did not help me make sense of the experiences that I encountered. The first difficulty was defining and specifying what/who the local is.³⁶ Oliver Richmond, for example, qualifies the concept with the label “local-local”³⁷ or what Gearoid Millar calls the “non-elite local.”³⁸ These, “more real” locals, instead of buying into the intervention’s discourse, experience its consequences without necessarily supporting its aims. In Istanbul, these distinctions were not so clear-cut—we obviously all supported peace, but the visions of what that peace might look like differed greatly. Similarly, there were obvious differences in our positionalities, but it was impossible to create a hierarchy of “elitism” that would take into consideration class differences, religious identities, sexual orientations, or ethnicities and nationalities that we had to fit in.

A rich literature has already uncovered the problematic uses of the local—that it is binary, essentialist, and static; depoliticised and romanticised; and it serves as an apologia for the failures of interventions.³⁹ Taking these critiques into account, Séverine Autesserre states that all micro approaches are connected by their aim to “look at peacekeeping processes beyond international, national or capital-based dynamics.”⁴⁰ In this view then, the local might be interpreted as that which is not the international, national, nor directly part of global capitalism. My fellow participants, however, did not consider themselves separated from the international, and even in the cases in which they did, they evaluated this separation as a *problem* to be resolved, not an identity *marker* to work with.

Governmentality was similarly complicated. What I interpreted as a neoliberal focus on the local through governmental techniques was problematised from the introduction session onward. Many people there were obviously not “buying into” these discourses of reconciliation and entrepreneurship, they were there for the free flight or to smoke shisha in cafés. Other people were already oriented towards the goals we were supposed to be transforming to. Some were there specifically for the promised contacts and networks, well

³⁵ Comment by one of the participants in a group conversation about the *Empathy Studio*.

³⁶ MacGinty and Richmond, ‘The Local Turn in Peace Building’, 769.

³⁷ Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace*; Richmond, ‘Becoming Liberal, Unbecoming Liberalism’.

³⁸ Millar, *An Ethnographic Approach to Peacebuilding*.

³⁹ Paffenholz, ‘Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding’; Kappler, ‘The Dynamic Local’; Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’; Chandler, ‘Race, Culture and Civil Society’.

⁴⁰ Autesserre, ‘Going Micro’, 492.

versed in the market rationality that we were being taught. Others were explicitly leftist and came prepared for deflecting these narratives and pursuing their own agendas—thus developing their politics through supposedly anti-political practices of civil society and entrepreneurship. Many were engaged in civil societies in their home countries and came to seek very specific skills. Moreover, everyone was aware that the skills that they were learning might not work back home where connections, nepotism, and party affiliation matter more than CVs and well-developed entrepreneurial selves. In all these different experiences, it was obvious to us that none of us were going to leave the workshop as well functioning *homo oeconomicus* described in governmentality studies.

These observations pointed to larger debates within governmentality studies in International Relations (IR). As governmentality was increasingly used to explain international politics, a number of critics like Jan Selby, David Chandler, and Jonathan Joseph started questioning such appropriation of the concept that Foucault developed primarily while investigating domestic matters.⁴¹ In addressing their critique, Wanda Vradi summarises it in three points. First, they argue that governmentality cannot be simply “scaled up.” Second, governmentality cannot “work” in spaces that are not governed by advanced liberal rule. And third, they raise the point that by a focus on freedom used in governing, governmentality studies lose sight of imperialism and constraints that are still present in international politics.⁴²

These theoretical critiques fit my empirical observations—while the practices I witnessed in Istanbul might mean something for the domestic order, those practices and their effects cannot be directly applied to the international. We might change our “home societies” upon return, but does this change anything between Serbia as a state and states that make the “international community”? Moreover, it was obvious that even if we are transformed by our experiences in Istanbul, we are going home to societies that do not function as advanced liberal democracies described by scholars of governmentality. While the practices I observed in Istanbul might be neoliberal governmentality of international peacebuilding and statebuilding, by going back into societies lacking democracy we are inevitably going back to “something else.”

This thesis is animated by these tensions: what can this discrepancy between intent and reception tell us about intervention? Is it a case of a simple failure? Is there more to

⁴¹ Selby, ‘Engaging Foucault’; Chandler, ‘Globalising Foucault’; Joseph, ‘What Can Governmentality Do for IR?’; Joseph, ‘The Limits of Governmentality’; Joseph, ‘Governmentality of What?’

⁴² Vradi, ‘Universal but Not Truly “Global”’, 50.

governmentality than “depoliticisation”? Are there wider effects that go beyond what is intended? Is governmentality “defeated” if we arrive thinking about holidays instead of improving ourselves? Is it somehow different if we are already implicated in global neoliberalism by participating in a professionalised civil society? Is it somehow overrun if our flexible citizenship is vanquished in an encounter with corrupt bureaucracies in our home countries? How are these experiences of a governmental local turn related to the rationalities I found in the application forms and program descriptions? And perhaps most importantly, if I am to make sense of these experiences, where exactly do I have to look when the intervention rationale does not provide any answers that fit?

III Subjectivity and ethnography as methodology

In exploring these problematisations of the local and its governmentality interpretations, I use an ethnographic orientation toward experience. In trying to access the experiences of interventions that are usually neglected, ethnography comes out as especially useful. It is “grounded,” able to appreciate the experiential, and oriented towards those who are usually erased from the study of world politics. Contrary to approaches that study interveners themselves or the governmental rationalities that they promote, what brought me to Istanbul was a desire to go beyond the intent of government and consider its reception.⁴³ In the vocabulary of governmentality studies, I did not seek to inquire into the political rationality that shapes subjectivities, but how subjectivities experience the practices of that rule.

Ethnography here responds to a particular problem in intervention scholarship—lack of engagement with the experiences of those targeted by projects that seek to improve and transform. In her evaluation of liberal peace critiques, Meera Sabaratnam emphasises the importance of a more general change in who the subjects of IR are.⁴⁴ She argues that while the critics of intervention and the local turn proliferate, these scathing critiques of interventions still ignore the targets of these projects: by analytically and methodologically bypassing them; and by casting them as ontologically different. Put simply, in the efforts to unearth the violence committed by (neo)liberal ideologies and global capitalism during

⁴³ Here I join a number of ethnographers who have similarly explored governmentality in various state and international intervention: Li, *The Will to Improve*; Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*; Hemment, *Youth Politics in Putin's Russia*.

⁴⁴ Sabaratnam, ‘IR in Dialogue ... but Can We Change the Subjects?’

interventions, these critiques once more erase the local subjecthood under the weight of political economy or powerful discourses of liberal peace.⁴⁵ Subjects become mere “mute objects or data points.”⁴⁶

In her latest work, Sabaratnam proposes to ameliorate these problems by decolonising intervention. The exclusion of the voices of the targets of intervention is not accidental, “but [is] emblematic of diverse forms of intellectual Eurocentrism within scholarly research.”⁴⁷ This Eurocentric orientation of intervention scholarship obscures, avoids, and erases the target subjects of interventions.⁴⁸ They are seen as subjects that cannot “generate their own meaningful terms of engagement with interveners, nor critically evaluate the problems of modernity and development.”⁴⁹ This critique might seem paradoxical after the local turn—at a time where both the problem and the solution to the world’s problems are located in individuals, Sabaratnam’s work highlights how the subjecthood of precisely those individuals is erased. While these erasures will be further investigated in Chapter 1, for now it is enough to point out that there are no Bosnians in David Chandler’s critique of European Union’s (EU’s) involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), there are no subjects in Milja Kurki’s interpretation of EU democracy promotion as governmentality, and the sociological turn in intervention scholarship refers to the sociology of *the interveners*, not those *intervened upon*.⁵⁰

In response, Sabaratnam’s book “builds an alternative explanation of the international phenomenon of intervention upwards from the experiences, interpretations and historical conditions of these targets.”⁵¹ This thesis builds on that project and uses ethnography as a starting point for theorising from the experiences of subjects who are supposed to reap the benefits of interventions.

The rationale for starting from the experiences of those targeted by interventions is then twofold.⁵² First, it is a political move to include the voices that are usually erased. This

⁴⁵ Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism’.

⁴⁶ Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*, 17.

⁴⁷ Sabaratnam, 6.

⁴⁸ Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*; Sabaratnam, ‘IR in Dialogue ... but Can We Change the Subjects?’; Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism’.

⁴⁹ Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*, 23. She identifies five specific avatars of Eurocentrism as it relates to the targets of interventions. See p. 23–34, and also Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism’.

⁵⁰ Chandler, *Empire in Denial*; Chandler, *Bosnia*; Kurki, ‘Governmentality and EU Democracy Promotion’; Goetze, *The Distinction of Peace*.

⁵¹ Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*, 6.

⁵² Sabaratnam makes similar points when she talks about her objectives when including the targets: one is the need for “recognition and humanisation” and the other is an “intellectual and analytic” aim. Sabaratnam, 43.

decolonial dimension refers to creating space for engagement with different subjects of IR that are *erased* in scholarship—those who are targeted by, rather than those who launch, international interventions. This move works towards “recognition and humanisation” of the subjects of intervention.⁵³ And second, it is a methodological and analytical project of incorporating the study of subjectivities—those that are usually seen as mundane and everyday—into IR.⁵⁴ My own approach seeks to start from people’s “critical evaluations” and explore effects of intervention as experienced beyond civil society, and party and institutional politics. To do so, this thesis is not concerned with adding ethnographic detail to the usual subjects of IR like the military, diplomats, or security discourses.⁵⁵ Nor is it concerned with adding ethnographic details to the lives of the interveners, as has been done exceptionally well in development;⁵⁶ humanitarianism;⁵⁷ and peacebuilding.⁵⁸ It takes a different direction: instead of researching the everyday of the high politics of the international, the thesis examines how the international is present in the local everyday.

Contrary to those who argue for the separation of governmentality from ethnography, I see ethnography as complementary to studies of governmentality. Foucault famously removed himself from the “witches brew” of governing in “real life” (in the prison) and focused on political rationalities, rather than actual practices of government and their effects in real life.⁵⁹ This tension will be addressed in Chapter 2, but I broadly follow Tania Li’s insistence on including practice into governmentality research.⁶⁰ Ethnography starts from experiences (as opposed to political rationalities) and complicates any idea of a smooth operation of power as a one-directional creation of subjects—thus proving useful not only for approaching local experiences, but also as a counter-balance to governmentality studies that usually stay out of the “witches brew” of real life.

⁵³ Sabaratnam, 43.

⁵⁴ This project of theorising from “the everyday” is already underway in IR. For example, see the forum in International Political Sociology: Guillaume, ‘Forum: The International as an Everyday Practice’. However, in my own work I do not try to theorise the everyday itself, as is the case with the literature inspired by Michel de Certeau’ *The Practice of Everyday Life*. For an example of such work, see the recent PhD dissertation de Figueiredo Summa, ‘Enacting Everyday Boundaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina’.

⁵⁵ Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*; Neumann, *At Home with the Diplomats*; Cohn, ‘Motives and Methods’; Cohn, ‘Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals’.

⁵⁶ This sub-literature is known as aidnographies, it was first popularised by Mosse, *Cultivating Development*; Lewis and Mosse, *Development Brokers and Translators*. See also Mosse, *Adventures in Aidland*; Mosse, ‘The Anthropology of International Development’; In Eastern Europe, Wedel has done most important work on that flows of ideas and money through what she calls brokers, see Wedel, “Studying Through” a Globalizing World’; Wedel, *Collision and Collusion*.

⁵⁷ Malkki, *The Need to Help*.

⁵⁸ Autesserre, *Peaceland*; Goetze, *The Distinction of Peace*.

⁵⁹ Foucault, ‘Governmentality’, 81–82.

⁶⁰ Li, ‘Governmentality’; Li, ‘Beyond “The State” and Failed Schemes’.

With these limitations of the local turn literature and governmentality studies, an ethnographic focus on lived experience of the targets of intervention becomes a fruitful field of study. What can the expectations of my colleagues in Istanbul tell us about how interventions are practiced? What can they tell us about transformations in the Balkans in the past 20 years? What do their experiences in the week tell us about the way that rationality of the project approaches the local? What can they tell us about international politics?

IV Research puzzle and setting

In short, this thesis aims to learn from those who are supposed to be transformed by practices of international intervention—it seeks to change who the subjects of intervention scholarship are. Such a reorientation will lead to new analytical insights for the study of interventions and IR scholarship more generally. However, before learning from the experiences of these subjects, it is also necessary to take stock of the current efforts to introduce them to IR and develop new tools that reflectively tackle the problems that might arise. Thus, the central research question of the thesis is: *How can we approach subjectivities targeted by international interventions, and what can we learn by doing so?*

In asking this question, the thesis moves beyond the local turn literature that seeks to “employ” the local for the goals of interventions, and it sidesteps governmentality discussions that aim to adjudicate what the true rationality of the local turn is. Instead of debating the liberal nature of these interventions or the lack thereof, the thesis approaches liberalism implicit in projects that seek to modernise and empower as a lived reality observed in the field and retold by my interlocutors. It asks how we might re-think the way that we study interventions so that we make space for these experiences in our research projects.

The above definitions of the local enable the argument that focusing on the local should be done to recover the sense of subjecthood of the targets; better evaluate the intervention itself; or improve it by enabling “more genuine local ownership.”⁶¹ My own strategy, however, seeks to engage these experiences beyond seeing them as necessarily concerned with peace, separated from the regional, national, and international, or divided into those who “buy into” and “resist” intervention. In pursuing this research strategy, I define local subjectivities as people I encountered during fieldwork who are seen and see themselves to be the targets of interventions. Thus, the thesis builds onto recent projects

⁶¹ Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*; Millar, *An Ethnographic Approach to Peacebuilding*; Donais, *Peacebuilding and Local Ownership Post-Conflict Consensus-Building*.

which complicate how we think about the local and that try to theorise intervention from the bottom up.

These questions are pursued in two research settings in contemporary Serbia: non-formal youth education and agricultural governance. Serbia as the location of the study emerged from its peculiar position in international politics: from the international pariah under the genocidal regime of Slobodan Milošević, through a short spell of democracy assistance super-star in the efforts to replace him, to the current positioning between the EU and Russia. While it has been targeted by all possible interventions—NATO bombings, democracy promotion, development initiatives, and EU integration—it is missing from IR studies of the region that focus on the spectacular sovereignty-challenging interventions that are unfolding in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).⁶² Serbia thus provides a space in which the agency of the international community is subtle and dispersed, and yet omnipresent and constantly discussed in everyday politics.

The contemporary transformation efforts in Serbia are framed as a “return to Europe” and “Europeanisation.” However, while EU membership seems to be the goal without an alternative,⁶³ the actors and tools are more diverse. Besides the EU, many political foundations, bilateral agreements, international organisations, and hundreds of NGOs continue to do the work of the international intervention even in the absence of highly concentrated efforts that are thoroughly studied in BiH and Kosovo. While dispersed, the desired transformation is all-encompassing. Serbia is said to be in a “triple transition:” an economic transition underlined by a belief in free market capitalism, a democratic transition toward liberal democracy, and a transition to peace which sees transitional justice and reconciliation as its goals.⁶⁴ Most importantly, while it might not be in international news, the efforts to promote peace, democracy, and the free market in Serbia are not absent—the following section introduces two fields where transformation is marked by international presence and that orient the empirical practice of the thesis.

⁶² For an example of different interventions in the Balkans, see Siani-Davies, *International Intervention in the Balkans since 1995*; Woodward, ‘The Long Intervention’.

⁶³ The “no alternative” narrative is surprisingly literal. For example: the slogan of the Democratic Party in 2011 was simply “There is no alternative to Europe/EU” [*Evropa nema alternative.*] Mikuš deals with this example in his PhD thesis on reforms in Serbia, Mikuš, ‘What Reform?’, 89.

⁶⁴ The connection between “transition” and subjectivity transformations is explored in Makovicky, *Neoliberalism, Personhood, and Postsocialism*. I will further pursue this issue in Chapter 1. While this seeming novelty of the intervention’s concern with local subjectivities will also be somewhat contextualised in Chapter 1, it is important to note here that in addition to political, analytical, and methodological reasons to starting from subjectivities, subjectivities also emerge from the policies of interventions themselves.

i. Policy sites as fields

The thesis focuses on two particular fields, non-formal education (NFE) and agricultural governance, that act as settings for my research. An alternative to choosing policy fields would have been focusing on particular projects or donors. This, however, would entail remaining faithful to intervention's conceptual limitations: what the donors deem important and what they choose to turn into projects. A view of these fields allowed me to track experiences as they are made in the intersection of many actors and issues, and at times complicated even my own idea of what the site is.⁶⁵

The reasoning for the choice of specific fields is twofold. First, the two fields and their seemingly “apolitical” character provide a unique chance to study the less spectacular and less researched interventions in local politics. Second, as a project that seeks to complicate visions of the local—in both practices and scholarship of intervention—I also wanted to depart from the usual categories that the Balkans are placed in: transitional justice, democracy support and electoral transformation, EU integration in the form of rule of law, or typical civil society studies.

Non-formal youth education (NFE), in the form of schools on democracy, civic rights, human rights, and conflict resolution has become an orthodox tool of “soft” interventions. It is situated firmly within the realm of civil society because civil society organisations (CSOs) are the providers of NFE, and it offered easy access to local everyday experiences through attending workshops and interviewing trainers and participants. This allowed me to explore how the supposed beneficiaries of NFE relate to themselves and the political life around them.

While NFE is an area which is firmly in the civil society sphere and has many different donors involved, the second area of interest, agricultural policy reform, is state led and EU mandated, and presented as an apolitical, developmental project not relating to concepts like freedom and democracy. As such, it provides an opportunity to explore interventions in a sphere very different from the civil society realm of NFE, but at the same time animated by many of the same assumptions of what makes a “transition.” In focusing upon this area, I explore how civil servants, CSOs, and producers themselves are imagined changing according to ideals of liberal peace and neoliberal subjectivity, and I highlight how a focus on experiences of this transformation complicates such readings.

⁶⁵ Even though these two policy sites are the foundation of the thesis' empirical practice, one of the contributions is highlighting the limitations of such understandings of the “field” and the thesis ultimately goes “beyond” these fields. I will come back to this in Chapter 6 and in the Conclusion.

In taking these fields as sites where I explore the encounters between everyday subjectivities and international projects, I follow other works that have similarly studied the interaction of the local and the international beyond the usual outcomes and actors. These works are scattered across disciplines and they have all provided invaluable input for the thesis. Daniela Lai, for example, expanded the common understanding of transitional justice in BiH to encompass socio-economic claims and redistribution.⁶⁶ Another literature discusses the politicisation of LGBT and queer identities in relation to EU, and the West more generally, exceptionally well. In doing this, it simultaneously works against the idea that EU values shape an otherwise shapeless mass and remains attentive enough to its power to critique its shortcomings and emphasise real and potential achievements.⁶⁷ The subfield of critical policy studies tends to study the welfare state with particular attention to hierarchies of EU/non-EU. A number of authors within it productively engaged with the post-war transformations in South East Europe.⁶⁸ Within transitional justice, Mladen Ostojić examined the legacy of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) within Serbian domestic politics, and Jelena Subotić focused on the strategic use of international goals and norms within Serbia.⁶⁹ In anthropology, Stef Jansen and Andrew Gilbert contextualised intervention in BiH within longer and wider local dynamics,⁷⁰ and Theodora Vetta and Marek Mikuš minutely examined how democracy promotion in Serbia resulted in a very specific form of neoliberal civil society.⁷¹ Finally, a rich field of cultural studies is grappling with the ways in which the ideal of the EU intersects with local desires and contexts to produce what it means to be Balkan, post-Yugoslav, or Serbian.⁷²

This thesis is a contribution to this project of developing a more nuanced appreciation of international efforts in the region without erasing the subjectivities of those whose lives are supposed to be transformed in these efforts. At the same time, I also wish to generate

⁶⁶ Lai, 'Transitional Justice as Redistribution: Socioeconomic (In)Justice and the Limits of International Intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina'; see also Lai, 'Transitional Justice and Its Discontents'.

⁶⁷ Bilić, 'Europeanization, LGBT Activism, and Non-Heteronormativity in the Post-Yugoslav Space'; Bilić, *LGBT Activism and Europeanisation in the Post-Yugoslav Space*; Sloodmaeckers, 'The Litmus Test of Pride'; Kulpa, 'Western *Leveraged Pedagogy* of Central and Eastern Europe'.

⁶⁸ Lendvai and Stubbs, 'Assemblages, Translation, and Intermediaries in South East Europe'; Lendvai, 'Europeanization of Social Policy?'; Stubbs, 'Performing Reform in South East Europe'; Deacon and Stubbs, *Social Policy and International Interventions in South East Europe*.

⁶⁹ Ostojić, *Between Justice and Stability*; Subotić, *Hijacked Justice*.

⁷⁰ Jansen, 'The Privatisation of Home and Hope'; Gilbert, 'Foreign Authority and the Politics of Impartiality'.

⁷¹ Vetta, 'Let's Get Up!'; Mikuš, 'What Reform?'

⁷² Petrović, *Yuropa*; Petrović, *Mirroring Europe*; Volčič, 'The Notion of "the West" in the Serbian National Imaginary'; Greenberg, 'On the Road to Normal'; Spasić and Petrovic, 'Varieties of "Third Serbia"'.

some wider theoretical implications of the empirical analysis for the study of intervention and IR more generally.

V Thesis argument

The most visceral illustration of the rationale for an orientation toward experiences of intervention came from my own (unavoidable despite my efforts) participation in the *Empathy Studio* exercise. In addition to clarifying the questions of governing and being governed that focus the puzzle of this thesis, my time in Istanbul forced me to critically approach my own positionality in this project. I was obviously a participant of the event, but I was also a researcher academically approaching these experiences. I did not come unprepared: I was aware of the literature on doing “ethnography at home,” I was aware of the strange construction of “home” that can turn a Turkish university into “native” terrain, I was invited by supervisors to consider how my own positionality might be captured by the concept of hybridity. Yet, this workshop was the first time that I actually embodied this oscillating identity.

As I was comfortably lulled into the sounds of my native language during cigarette breaks and discussed the familiar smells of Turkish coffee that mark homes across Yugoslavia as well, I felt at home. As we shyly asked each other where we spent the war years, it was obvious that I share many concerns and experiences with my colleague participants. Yet, as the discussions started, I began taking notes in English on my laptop. In asking for everyone’s participation consent, my foreignness was pried open by questions about funding and scholarships that allowed me to travel from a Hungarian based MA to a UK PhD. More than anything, in discussing consent forms and my methodology with Dr Howard who facilitated the workshop, I automatically felt different: when asking about papers, ethics, and conferences, he did not look at me as a participant or a local peace agent anymore, but instead as a British-based colleague.

Perhaps luckily, for the *Empathy Studio* exercise I was paired with a very young and easy-going Bosniak man. He thoroughly enjoyed the week and made this very clear at the closing session. He did not feel he needed any specific healing, but he also did not feel particularly insulted by the “elephant in the room” narrative. Writing this almost three years later, it is obvious that I should have known that nothing bad or uncomfortable will happen—Edin was an easy-going guy and his question followed this. Yet, I did not know this when I stepped in the small classroom turned into a recording studio. As I sat down, facing Edin in the middle of the multiple-person filming crew, I felt trapped by the gaze of

several lights and cameras. The discomfort persisted even after they turned the cameras to film only our hands upon my request. Dr Howard came in and leisurely leaned on the door frame. He did not come into any other sessions and I felt observed—is this how everyone else felt as I took notes throughout the week? As possible questions raced through my mind, I was completely unable to separate myself from the expectations that others might have of me: is this the time to inhabit my role as a “war affected” individual? Is this the time to try to exercise researcher’s distance? Will Dr Howard think that I am “too local” and doubt my methodology if I become too emotional? Or will he consider me a transnational academic and negate my home attachments if I ask a question that is boring and removed from the post-conflict experience that I am supposed to have? The questions might seem banal, but the visceral feeling and the contractions in my stomach were real. It is these issues that shaped the questions I asked, my ways of answering them, and the arguments I produced.

I use this anecdote not only to bring myself into the text as advised by ethnographic orientations, but to emphasise the political relevance of the ways that we engage subjects that are perceived as local in practices and scholarship of intervention. As I pondered the different shades of anger expressed by the group in reaction to the *Empathy Studio* exercise and wondered about my own discomfort at the naturally multiple roles I inhabit, I started realising that there is a larger problem with how subjectivities, *local* subjectivities, are engaged by practices and scholarships of intervention. The group anger and my own reaction were only a small symptom, a visceral illustration, of a much larger problem. Namely, the failure to engage the people targeted in these projects as full, contemporaneous, contradictory, and complete subjects of international political and social life.

In short, the thesis forwards the argument that remaining methodologically and analytically faithful to the concept of intervention will always be in tension with efforts to learn *about* and *from* experiences of everyday people. The discomfort that I felt while being filmed for the *Empathy Studio* exercise stemmed from trying to fit my own subjectivity in the concept of “intervention”—I was either the local that needed saving, or a detached international scholar. This feeling of confinement, conceptual inadequacy, and even epistemic violence continued throughout my fieldwork—not in relation to my own experiences that were usually less participatory than that particular session in Istanbul, but when trying to make sense of the stories narrated to me by the people I spoke to. Despite the recent rush to the local, the concept of intervention reduces the subjects to nothing more than the targets of those interventions, even when it tries to grasp their realities and experiences.

To make sense of motivations for attending NFE, I had to understand unemployment and migration in a “transitional” economy. To understand the seemingly irrational policies in agriculture, I had to understand the allure of Europe in a place that is continuously denied its European identity. To understand my own discomfort, I had to ask what makes me want to preserve my idea of self as a UK PhD student *or* a child of Yugoslavia. I thus looked at people as more than “targets.” They were political subjects, navigating intervention at the same time as finding their place in wider global flows and local circumstance. To try to understand them, I had to look beyond intervention and treat these experiences as political on their own terms.

Practicing these lessons becomes, ultimately, impossible within the confines of the concept of intervention. Thus, the thesis concludes by advocating that we forego the concept of “intervention” and instead investigate these dynamics through research focused on *politics of improvement*. I capture the shift in two moves that locate subjects and dislocate intervention. First, the clear subject positions between the local and the international that are constitutive parts of intervention are replaced by more nuanced positioning—it is true that the position of *the improver* and *the improved* make the politics of improvement, but these positions respond to neither the scales nor the identities of local/international. Engaging subjects, and their politics, means trying to move beyond these insufficient heuristic devices. And second, by thinking these subjects as *coeval* with the practices and discourses of intervention we are forced to look beyond intervention itself and rethink the way we understand concepts like subjectivity, governmentality, or liberalism.

I then develop the concept politics of improvement through a conversation with the work of anthropologist of development Tania Li, and especially her book *The Will to Improve*. In the book, even though the topics include interventions from colonialism to World Bank conservation and civil society building efforts, Li does not study intervention, but what she calls “improvement schemes”—programmes that are guided by an undying “will to improve” the lives of populations, and which are a constant, if ever-changing, feature of political, social, economic, and ecological life.⁷³ In her study, she examines the rationalities and effects of these schemes not in isolation from one another, but as projects that layer onto each other and create multiple positionings that open or close possibilities for practicing politics.

Politics of improvement emphasise a conceptual shift from intervention to politics of improvement: even though they are underpinned by the same teleological ideas of progress

⁷³ Li, *The Will to Improve*, 7-12.

and history, improvement schemes are not seen as being constituted by the inside/outside of nation-states, nor are they discrete acts that necessarily lead to liberal rule. In so doing, I am not advocating only a fuller appreciation of the rich encounters guided by the mission of improvement. International interventions, understood as discrete acts of varying levels of coercion and interference, are indeed the main way that politics of improvement are currently conducted. However, I want to push to look at their blurry margins *and* beyond. This kind of empirical opening is already underway with scholars of intervention studying land politics, cultural practices, and everyday lives.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, I fear that introducing these “new” areas in existing frameworks will once again reduce their complexity to well-established parsimonies that limit how we understand agents, acts, and effects of these projects.

i. Chapter outline

The thesis proceeds in three parts that relate to the central question of how to approach local subjectivities in interventions, and what we might learn by doing so. Part I sets out the problem and my way of navigating it; Part II explores how subjectivities are connected to interventions in two fields: non-formal youth education and agricultural governance; and Part III employs the discoveries from Part II as prompts for a more fundamental rethinking of analytical concepts and methodological frameworks.

Part I emphasises why we should seek to engage these subjects and highlights some limits to approaches that have tried to do so thus far. In response, it develops my own framework for doing so.

Chapter 1 dives into the connection between subjectivities and interventions as a form of rule by reviewing the turn to localism that has marked both the practice and scholarship on interventions. It situates the focus on the local in interventions within a longer overview of the connection between subjectivity and power. Subjectivity here is seen as *constitutive of* and *constituted by* forms of rule. In doing so, the chapter raises the stakes of the research question—asking questions from the experiences of those that are supposed to benefit from interventions does not tell us only things about practices and logics of interventions, but more generally about how forms of rule are connected to everyday lives. In reviewing literatures that increasingly aim to “bring back the local,” the chapter raises two issues of conceptualising local agency: that of the location of political agency that is often placed on

⁷⁴ Millar, “We Have No Voice for That”; Kappler and Richmond, ‘Peacebuilding and Culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina Resistance or Emancipation?’; de Figueiredo Summa, ‘Enacting Everyday Boundaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina’.

the side of the international and removed from the local realm; and the interconnectedness of that political agency with international power.

These two issues are a starting point for Chapter 2 which presents a framework that seeks to locate political agency with the targets of interventions, while avoiding romanticising it or treating it as separated or bounded from the international. While governmentality is used to explore the connection between forms of government and subjectivities, ethnographic methodology is utilised to inquire into the subjectivity side of governmentality (as opposed to the usual focus on political rationalities). The meeting point of these two literatures is presented as an invitation for a more fluid methodology presented at the end of Chapter 2. This methodology understands ethnography through two issues. First, it pays special attention to the tools for generating knowledge—the researcher herself, and the frameworks, methods, and concepts she uses. And second, it is oriented towards the world as it is made in meaning, and structures that might be underwriting that meaning.

After Part I focused on *why* and *how* to engage local subjectivities, Part II goes on to practice this framework in two fields and asks what is brought into view with this new approach that focuses on subjectivities. After Chapter 3 shortly provides historical context for a study in Serbia, Chapters 4 and 5 ask how subjectivities engage interventions in the form of non-formal youth education and agricultural governance.

Chapter 4 shows how youth in Serbia are not just governed towards neoliberal ideals of entrepreneurship, a liberal civil society, and economism, but how youth actively navigate non-formal youth education as part of the political economy of unemployment. However, the chapter avoids this question of intentionality—whether my interlocutors “buy into” or “strategically manoeuvre” within neoliberal rationalities. On the contrary, the chapter uses governmentality as a tool to learn about government precisely from this ambiguity; namely, how government in Serbia connects to international flows and blurs the lines between state and civil society, freedom and constraint, governmentality and politics.

Chapter 5 focuses on different fields of visibility—namely the restrictions that translate from the choice of concepts to our empirical practice. By following the experiences of different subjects in agricultural governance, the chapter delves into the field of agricultural land governance which is at the same time framed by narratives of intervention, and officially outside the realm of EU involvement. In doing so, the chapter points to two things further discussed in Part III: it demonstrates the limitations of the concept of intervention—i.e. land that remains out of sight of traditional intervention scholarship, and it uncovers different forms of power and subject positions that exist within this field.

Even though Part II presents the thesis' empirical practice, analytical arguments are developed through this empirical engagement. In accordance with my definition of ethnography as a reflexive practice, Part II remains in constant oscillation between expectations of my frameworks and concepts, and the stories I encountered in fieldwork. These reflections form the basis of Part III which steps out of the field to develop these analytical arguments further. In doing so, it answers the question of what we can learn from engaging the subjectivities of those who are supposed to reap the benefits of international interventions.

This approach does more than add empirical detail to the two fields under study. There are three disruptions highlighted in Chapter 6: the empirical practice of Part II uncovers subject position, forms of power, and fields of visibility that go beyond those imagined by concepts such as intervention or liberal governmentality. The thesis sees *subjects* who are supposed to be empowered, but also those who are expected to silently disappear. The *power* that engages them is sometimes nurturing and dispersed, but at other times coercive and violent. And the *fields* in which these experiences are made far transcend the narrow fields of action described in program documents and policies.

These disruptions are distilled through two methodological and analytical discussions: the tension between experiential and structural critiques, and the appearance of liberalism as a coherent rule promoted where it is lacking. The two discussions are pushed forward by a rethinking of scale. The thesis argues for considering scale as identity, a level of power operation, and as a feature of explanatory frameworks. Such reconceptualisation allows me to advocate for continual oscillation between fieldwork and theory, structure and experience, answers and surprises. Moreover, such a conception builds on critiques of liberalism and decolonial thought that emphasise that liberalism always works through heterogeneity despite its assertion of universality.⁷⁵ This calls for a critique that would remain attentive to both experiences and structures, and that would approach liberalism as a lived reality that depends on naturalising dichotomies like local/international and liberal/illiberal. We can then learn about global politics by listening to everyday stories, and we can better comprehend the importance of international politics as they make and are made in everyday lives and subjectivities. The global stops being a simple amalgamation of localities, and the local is not reduced to a vernacularization of global processes. In the world we study they

⁷⁵ For more on heterogeneity of governmental rule (in the post-colonial world), see Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*.

“call each other into being” as they orient both everyday practice and “high” politics.⁷⁶ And in our scholarship, they invite us to think big while trying to understand global politics, and practice humility while trying to remain faithful to our interlocutors

Finally, Chapter 6 argues that the concept of intervention itself stands at the heart of our analytical problems: it essentialises conceptions of local and international and it occludes the coevalness of spaces and processes. Instead, it suggests *politics of improvement* as a concept through which to approach these programs, agents, and practices that seek to promote peace, development, and democracy around the world. Instead of depending on fixed positions, we locate a multiplicity of subjects that are coeval and invite us to think about the various threads that join them across scales and locations.

The Conclusion once again reviews the work presented in the thesis and connects it to specific literatures. The thesis answers the question we started with by arguing that we can approach subjectivities of those intervened upon through an ethnographic exploration of the connection between subjectivity and forms of rule—locating them as political subjects. From there, it shows that such a practice ultimately leads to dislocating intervention itself. However, because its methodology emphasises reflexivity during knowledge production, a series of arguments is developed in the background of the thesis: what it means to centre on subjectivity in IR, how we might start to reconsider the way we approach liberalism, how to reconcile expectations of ethnography and other methodological recipes with their use in the field, and how to think about the Balkan region differently with insights of colonial and post-colonial thought. These reflections and arguments are presented in the conclusion.

Before moving to politics of improvement in Chapter 6, the majority of the thesis proceeds with the language of intervention: there are donors, targets, project goals, time-frames, and rationalities. I have kept this language because it was this language and the relationship between *subjects* and *intervention* that motivated the project. Yet, in Chapter 6, I do not re-fashion intervention to make space for the people I spoke to, but I argue that the connection between the lives of those improved and the agents, rationalities, and practices of improvement cannot be understood through intervention defined as specific acts through which “international agents” promote liberal ideals. In doing so, I use excesses and disruptions that we face in such radical opening as a base for a more fundamental, and perhaps less conclusive, rethinking of the analytical and methodological tools that we use to

⁷⁶ I borrow the formulation of the local and the global “calling each other into being” from Johnson, ‘Narrating Entanglements’.

study international politics. This argument, if persuasive, may have important implications for how we study and engage intervention in IR, and beyond it.

ii. Scope of the project

It is important to note the scope of the project and shortly discuss what the thesis *does not do*. First of all, unlike many critics of international intervention, I am not trying to uncover or define their true nature: whether it is an imperial plot or a benevolent desire to develop. This would require exploring the intervention and the interveners more—a project tackled by many and producing a spate of works that unpack, define, and problematise interventions.⁷⁷ The thesis does, however, touch upon the nature of rule in those countries doing the intervention simply because every student of intervention always writes two stories: one about the accomplished West that does the intervention and is the holder of peace, development, and democracy, and the other about “the Rest” that is devoid of these things and needs help getting there.⁷⁸ In efforts to diagnose what “goes wrong” in the Rest, we are necessarily upholding the image of the West where things are “right.” In my own effort to step away from both the teleological narratives and the diagnoses which they enable, I also write a different story about the West, liberalism, and the interventions that it practices.⁷⁹

Along with moving away from focusing on true intentions, I also move away from trying to determine whether a particular intervention is a success or a failure. This too would require me to submit to the intervention’s definition of success/failure, something that I consciously write against. Recently, Gearoid Millar developed a thorough ethnographic methodology for evaluating peacebuilding missions.⁸⁰ While providing important insights into the dynamics of intervention and powerfully arguing for a more holistic and immersive approach to studying them, his framework remains limited by the parameters given by the intervention itself—and remaining within these parameters once more excludes those *already* absent from them.

⁷⁷ The literature is too vast to cover. For a selection from different fields, see Kurki, *Democratic Futures*; Heathershaw, ‘Unpacking the Liberal Peace’; Mitchell, *International Intervention in a Secular Age*; Escobar, *Encountering Development*.

⁷⁸ I borrow the formulation from Sadiki’s discussion of knowledge production in the study of democratic transitions. Sadiki, ‘Towards a “Democratic Knowledge” Turn?’, 710.

⁷⁹ An additional caveat is due in my approach to liberalism. In my approach to lived liberalism, I draw from others who have explored it theoretically, but stay away from treating it that way myself and instead approach it as a lived reality that animates my puzzle. Some works that have provided thorough critical appraisals of liberalism are Hindess, ‘Liberalism – What’s in a Name?’; Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism*; Povinelli, *Economics of Abandonment*; Barkawi and Laffey, *Democracy, Liberalism, and War*. Moreover, I read Foucault’s work on governmentality as a critique of liberal and neoliberal reason.

⁸⁰ Millar, *An Ethnographic Approach to Peacebuilding*.

It is precisely the desire to stay free of the parameters of the intervention that brings me to my final point of restraint when it comes to policy prescriptions. While engaging with the local turn literature and designing a methodological framework that might enable us to learn more from local experiences, I stay away from offering advice: I am not interested in figuring out how to do interventions, or local ownership, “better.” Following Li, I recognise that the jobs of a critic and a programmer are necessarily different: a programmer has to think within the parameters of the possible which are set by the powers at play, while the critic can focus precisely on the construction and effects of those parameters. While “programming demands closure” that allows one to focus on a particular issue and possible solution, critique depends on “openings.”⁸¹ As will become clearer in the following chapters, the scholar’s desire to study intervention requires similar closures. It is precisely against these closures that this thesis is written. If anything, I would argue for letting go of the idea that we always have advice to offer—the hubris that makes things doable and expertise practicable needs to be contained if we seek to not just help others, but to produce knowledge with them democratically.⁸²

⁸¹ Li, ‘Social Reproduction, Situated Politics, and The Will to Improve’, 116.

⁸² I borrow the idea of a democratic knowledge production from Sadiki, ‘Towards a “Democratic Knowledge” Turn?’

Chapter I

Finding the Local in Interventions

The global project of helping those lacking peace, democracy, and progress has fractured into an array of fields: democracy promotion, statebuilding, nation-building, peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction, and sustainable development, to name just a few. Each functions with its own best practice, issues, and criticisms, yet they have all recently found the local—whether in the form of civil society or the individual—as both the site and instrument of change. This chapter examines the role that local subjectivities have in practices and scholarship of intervention. It engages with what development studies have termed “the valorisation of the local” and the literature that has become known as the local turn in IR. Before moving on to Chapter 2 that develops my own framework for approaching local subjectivities in international interventions, this chapter takes stock of approaches that have sought to do so thus far, and reviews some of their limitations to anticipate the tensions that will inevitably arise in my own empirical practice.

The first part will track the seeming “downward movement” of interventions that used to focus on structural adjustment and institution building, but nowadays look at behavioural economics and individual choices. More than just looking at it in practice through concepts of local ownership, partnership, and participation, this part of the chapter will also trace how this turn to localism played out within the concepts of the everyday, hybridity, and friction that were developed to jostle the binaries of local-international, and “bring back” local agencies after an excessive focus on the international.

The second part of the chapter will complicate these moves. Firstly, it will question the self-proclaimed transformation “downwards” by uncovering the continuity, rather than disjuncture, in the ways that different forms of government have historically engaged with imagining the local as the subject of government. This transcends looking at the local as either a *tool* or an *obstacle* of progress and sees it as crucial for any design of government. Secondly, without dismissing the contributions of concepts like hybridity and friction, this section will also highlight the limits they encounter and that animate the methodology to be presented in Chapter 2. Finally, the last part of the chapter will examine some ways that the Serbian local has been imagined by introducing critical studies of Balkanism and existing literature on interventions in the region.

I The local from colonialism to intervention

Recent years have witnessed a proliferation of “localised, empirical and inductive approaches”¹ to both practicing and studying interventions. Writing as early as 2000 within development studies, Giles Mohan and Kristian Stokke have both identified and critically appraised what they read as “valorising the local over the general.” This move downwards worked within both “new” Right and “new” Left approaches to development—the “new” Right realised that supporting markets is not enough and became aware of the “cultural underpinnings” of the development processes, while the “new” Left emphasised the potentials of grassroots identity politics and radical democracy that would at the same time move away from Marxist economic reductionism *and* provide an alternative to mainstream (neoliberal) models of development.² As such, the turn to localism became attractive across political divides. Moreover, it united policy and scholarship of interventions as both converge on emphasising the importance of the local over then general.

i. Finding the local in practice

This downward move is perhaps best captured in Oliver Richmond’s four generations of peacebuilding: the first generation aimed for a negative peace and did not concern itself with much more than the state; the second generation more idealistically conceived of a civil peace that would resolve the political, economic, and social issues that led to conflict in the first place; the third generation embraced the “grassroots” and “bottom up” approaches and included concerns for democratisation, human rights, and economic reform; and the fourth generation, coming out of the critiques of the liberal peace approach of the previous generation, finally descended into the everyday, concerning itself with creating hybrid subjectivities that would usher in a new, post-Westphalian peace.³

In this move, the local did not just receive attention, but it also changed in quality. While it was often seen as the *source* of conflict, peacebuilding projects have also moved from this idea of the local as a spoiler of international designs, to valuing it as a *tool*. The works of Paul Lederach and Elise Boulding have popularized the idea that the micro-practices of the local and the everyday have a specific quality and indispensable potential for peacebuilding

¹ Mohan and Stokke, ‘The Dangers of Localism’, 242.

² Mohan and Stokke, 249, 255.

³ Richmond, *Peace in International Relations*, 99–115.

practices.⁴ Here, the role of the local everyday emerges as a *solution*, in contrast to previous approaches that saw it as a part of the problem.

Similar moves are discussed in literatures on democracy promotion, development, and statebuilding.⁵ But it is worth emphasising that even in these moves that see the local as a *solution*, the idea of it as a possible source of the problem has not disappeared. The difference now is that these problems stem from micro-identities, rather than any institutional designs or structural circumstance. This move is captured by Jessica Schmidt who observed a shift from conflict studies, which investigated *circumstances* that lead to violence, to peacebuilding, which studies violence as a part of *identity*.⁶ These agency-centred notions of peace and democracy allowed the rise of therapeutic approaches which seek to re-socialize faulty individuals and combine easily with the idea that the quotidian and the subjective hold the answers for ending war.⁷

This valorisation of the local reflected in a growing obsession with concepts like local ownership, partnership, participation, civil society, and capacity building. It is usually understood that local ownership entered the scene as a direct consequence of the failure of the developmental programs in the 1980s and 1990s, the backlash against harsh structural adjustments in the 1980s, and failures of democracy promotion in the Middle East in the 2000s. The fact that it always lacked clear “consistency or substance” did not stop it from becoming a staple in interventions around the world.⁸ While receiving a great deal of attention in literatures on statebuilding and peacebuilding as a novel approach, the move to local ownership was a continuation of the focus of participation and partnership that emerged in development in the 1980s.⁹ In development, the idea of participation and participatory research methods that valorise local knowledge over international expertise sought not only to correct the “unsuitable” international designs by privileging local knowledge, but they also bridged academia and practice through their focus on the

⁴ Mitchell, ‘Quality/Control’, 1630; Lederach, *Preparing for Peace*; Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*; Boulding, *Cultures of Peace*. For another engagement with Lederach's legacy, see Chandler, ‘Peacebuilding and the Politics of Non-Linearity’.

⁵ Bridoux and Kurki, *Democracy Promotion*, 67–69; Abrahamsen, ‘African Democracy’, 242; Schmidt, ‘Democracy Promotion in a Post-Political World’; Schmidt, ‘From Transformation to Reality’, 246; Bliesemann de Guevara, ‘Introduction: The Limits of Statebuilding’, 118.

⁶ Schmidt, ‘Democracy Promotion in a Post-Political World’, 239.

⁷ Schmidt, 239.

⁸ Chesterman, ‘Ownership in Theory and in Practice’, 4.

⁹ These methods were largely popularised by Robert Chambers. For examples of his work, see Chambers, ‘The Origins and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal’; Chambers, *Rural Development*; Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts?* For a review of this literature and its critiques, see Williams, ‘Evaluating Participatory Development’; Mohan and Stokke, ‘The Dangers of Localism’.

development of participatory research methods.¹⁰ Moreover, this move also held emancipatory potential that would work against the North-South hierarchies that usually determine the relationship between development actors and those in need of development.¹¹

Local ownership, however, is not the only road to be taken in the rush to the local. The underlying logic is also visible in discourses around capacity building, which similarly views institutions as not only the products of social contexts, but also productive of those contexts.¹² As such, building institutions changes individuals, but changing individuals also helps build effective and appropriate institutions. The link to capacity building then becomes obvious—in order for the locals to own anything, they have to develop capacities to do so.¹³

In this development, civil society emerges as a specific site for building those capacities.¹⁴ Once it was realised that the states that are intervened in are “weak,” “fragile,” or “failed,” civil society emerged as a more functional alternative through which *to take ownership*.¹⁵ Acknowledging the disparity between a Western-liberal conception of civil society and the realities around the world did not stop civil society from becoming a key partner for development, peacebuilding, and democracy promotion.¹⁶

The strength of these concepts lies in connecting the “downward moves” described above. As Simon Chesterman puts it, they conceptualise “the relationship between actual political control and the transformation in mentality.”¹⁷ This relationship that connects individual subjectivities, or mentality, with political control and transformation, will become crucial for both problem solving and critical intervention literatures. Today, it is safe to say that the valorisation of localism has become an orthodox dimension of international interventions.

ii. Finding the local in academia

In 2013, Vivienne Jabri argued that in the peacebuilding literature, “the ‘local’ factor” is “subsumed at best and totally negated at worst.”¹⁸ This argument is further clarified in the work of Meera Sabaratnam that diagnoses critiques of liberal peace with analytical and

¹⁰ For an analysis of Rural Participatory Appraisal as one such method, see Mohan and Stokke, ‘The Dangers of Localism’, 242–44.

¹¹ Mohan and Stokke, 247, 253.

¹² Donais, *Peacebuilding and Local Ownership Post-Conflict Consensus-Building*, 26–27.

¹³ Wilén, ‘Capacity-Building or Capacity-Taking?’, 341.

¹⁴ For a quick (if somewhat outdated) review of the literature linking civil society (NGOs) and democratisation, see Mercer, ‘NGOs, Civil Society and Democratization’.

¹⁵ Verkoren and Leeuwen, ‘Civil Society in Peacebuilding’, 160.

¹⁶ For early reflections, see the edited volume Hann and Dunn, *Civil Society Challenging Western Models*.

¹⁷ Chesterman, ‘Ownership in Theory and in Practice’, 4.

¹⁸ Jabri, ‘Peacebuilding, the Local and the International’, 3.

methodological bypassing of target subjects. She associates analytical bypassing with governmentality frameworks that will be discussed in Chapter 2, but methodological bypassing is obvious in classic critiques of liberal peace such as Richmond's *Transformation of Peace* and Chandler's *International Statebuilding: The rise of Post-Liberal Governance*.¹⁹ In those works, the critique of international efforts implied a methodological choice of centring on the "the genealogies, contradictions and trajectories of intellectual traditions associated with the 'West' as the key object of intellectual concern."²⁰ In this approach then, the target subjects are rendered simply irrelevant to academic inquiry. Sabaratnam uncovers the same tendency in empirical works that condemn both logics and outcomes of international interventions.²¹ While providing piercing critiques of the liberal peace, they nevertheless focus on the international efforts to promote it and do not try to engage with the experiences of those targeted by those projects.²²

With the realisation of the methodological and analytical privileging of the international, the obvious remedy for this absence of local voices is to focus on those who have been silenced by both the liberal peace project and its critics. Similarly to the apparent "re-localisation" of intervention practices narrated above, academic literature on interventions also recently focused on local input after years of neglect, and is trying to "bring local societies back into the scholarly discussion."²³ This "re-localisation" was done in IR through concepts of hybridity and friction.

The concept of hybridity developed by the post-colonial scholar Homi Bhabha has been used widely in efforts to re-conceptualise intervention dynamics as an *encounter* in which the local has agency, rather than an imposition of an external agenda on a passive recipient or a *tabula rasa*.²⁴ The literature nowadays is too vast for the space provided, so I will engage with some of its key concepts and authors, and then present critiques that are crucial for developing the approach to be presented in Chapter 2.²⁵

¹⁹ Richmond, *The Transformation of Peace*; Chandler, *International Statebuilding*.

²⁰ Sabaratnam, 'Avatars of Eurocentrism', 263.

²¹ Some of the works she criticises are Chandler, *Empire in Denial*; Chandler, *Bosnia*; Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*; Zaum, *The Sovereignty Paradox*; Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*.

²² Sabaratnam, 'Avatars of Eurocentrism', 264.

²³ Bliesemann de Guevara, 'Introduction: The Limits of Statebuilding', 118.

²⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

²⁵ For a genealogy of the concept in the peacebuilding literature, see Graef, *Practicing Post-Liberal Peacebuilding*, chap. 1. For recent engagements, see the edited volume Freedman and Lemay-Hébert, *Hybridity*. For putting it in conversation with hybridity in humanities and social studies, see Nadarajah and Rampton, 'The Limits of Hybridity', 54–57.

Hybridity started in biology, and moved through race studies into cultural theory.²⁶ In intervention literature, one of the earliest conceptualisations of hybridity is offered by Roger MacGinty in his book in which hybridisation is “regarded as a dynamic and complex process in which prior-hybridized entities coalesce, conflict, and re-coalesce with other prior-hybridized entities to produce a context of constant mixing and interchange.”²⁷ This definition brings to the fore what are supposed to be two main contributions of thinking with hybridity. First, instead of a one-directional process of imposition that results in an international design, we see a “dynamic and complex process” which results in “mix” of the local and the international. And second, the entities that are in this process, have already been hybridized in past encounters and hence the framework should be able to overcome the local/international binary that intervention scholarship usually works with. This approach is meant to move beyond the problems of overly neat, static, and top down analyses permeating more mainstream literature. Moreover, its less coherent reading of liberal peace promises to move the critique of intervention “beyond the level of caricature,” while at the same time avoiding the “romanticization of local, indigenous, customary, and traditional approaches to peacebuilding and development.”²⁸

Richmond’s work similarly revolves around the concept of hybridity. He focuses on post-colonial subjectivities to imagine a hybrid post-liberal peace. In Foucault’s late works on the care of self and others, Richmond sees a way of re-politicising the everyday, thus not only giving the local “the chance to speak” and avoiding the trap of methodological and analytical bypassing, but also making interventionary policies *engage with*, rather than *re-shape*, the other. For him, the attention to the everyday as a source of critical agency marks a distinct move: from liberalism’s tendency to governmentalize and depoliticise,²⁹ into post-liberal forms of peace. In these new forms of peace, “agencies are expressed that contaminate, transgress and modify both the international and the local” and “enable political mobilization to deal with everyday issues, to build representative institutions and locally resonant forms of statehood.”³⁰ He goes on to theorise post-colonial forms of civil society and critical agency, formed from social practices and subjugated knowledge, to usher in a new state, a state

²⁶ As such, hybridity was a key concept for racializing science and policies of the 19th and 20th centuries. For a detailed history, see Young, *Colonial Desire*.

²⁷ MacGinty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance*, 51.

²⁸ MacGinty, 3.

²⁹ Richmond, ‘Foucault and the Paradox of Peace-as-Governance Versus Everyday Agency’, 200–201.

³⁰ Richmond, ‘Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace’, 669.

“accountable to a global and post-colonial civil society, comprising a range of international actors working within the liberal peace and a range of international, elite and local—local actors exercising critical agency” which also applies to “the international and its institutions, which also to some degree are modified by such critical agency.”³¹ In this body of work, we see that including the local as a source of critical agency and resistance leads to hybridity that is not only more inclusive, but also more *emancipatory*.

As the hybridity literature was based on Bhabha’s concept, another sub-set of literature emerged from the readings of Anna Tsing’s *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*.³² Instead of just inquiring into the *outcome* of the encounter, as hybridity literature does, *friction* literature opens up the *process* by studying “the complications of peace-building and how hybridity occurs, not by focusing on the actors and concepts at either the international or local level, but on the friction between them.”³³ In some ways, the literature on friction was born out of the perceived failures of the hybridity literature—namely, it sought to counter hybridity’s reliance on “singular and static units” of interveners and locals, and offer a framework that “stresses the emergent and unexpected nature of unintended and unplanned consequences.”³⁴ As such, it meant to “move beyond the simplification of local versus global.”³⁵ However, such a project is proving to be more difficult.

a. What makes hybridity and friction?

Both hybridity and friction rely on the idea of two entities—the local and the international—coming together to create the processes that are then analysed. It is worth pausing here on the assumptions that underwrite the way that we understand these entities.

In intervention scholarship, the international is represented by the term liberal peace. It is worth mentioning here that the term international is often invoked not as a specific anarchical system of nation-states, but as a vague conglomerate often termed “international community.” The international community, whether celebrated or castigated, is not made up only of states, but also from transnational institutions like the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN), financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and big international non-governmental organisations like Oxfam or Save the Children. Even though it is defined only in particular instances by referring to

³¹ Richmond, ‘Critical Agency, Resistance and a Post-Colonial Civil Society’, 431.

³² Tsing, *Friction*.

³³ Millar, Lijn, and Verkoren, ‘Peacebuilding Plans and Local Reconfigurations’, 139.

³⁴ Millar, Lijn, and Verkoren, 139.

³⁵ Millar, Lijn, and Verkoren, 142.

specific actors in different empirical contexts, it intuitively makes sense to argue that “the international can become local if they leave the big ivory tower and the air conditioned room.”³⁶ I will leave the existence of ivory towers and air-conditioning around the world aside, but it is important to stress here that the international is not treated ontologically in itself (as opposed to something else that might be termed the global,) but as that which is not local, whether that is air conditioning or liberal values.³⁷ International is that which has a different *scale* and *quality* of agency than the local.³⁸ I will come back to this scalar issue both in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 6, but here I want to emphasise that the one thing that unites this international (community) is its seeming liberal quality already discussed in the Introduction. While there are those who rightfully contest this quality, even they agree that *there is* an understanding of international intervention as a liberal program³⁹—it is by *mixing* with the local that liberal peace can turn into either a failed project of illiberal government or into a more positive “post-liberal peace.”⁴⁰

While the international is represented by the intervention itself, the local required some conceptual leg-work to be brought to existence—it is at the same time imagined as having the *opposite* of liberal values, but needs to become useful for achieving changes towards precisely those values. As already glimpsed in the discussion of Richmond’s work, this local input is imagined in terms of everyday practices and resistance. The local turn thus sees the local as a *container* that holds the emancipatory potential for countering the inappropriate, heavy-handed, top-down approaches. Once again, the local becomes *productive* of the outcome of the intervention itself. The central question of the critiques of liberal peace coming out of the local turn thus becomes how to open that container—or “how best to ‘access’ all *other* narratives so far silenced by the predominance of imposed *liberal* blueprints of peacebuilding, development and emancipation.”⁴¹

³⁶ Kappler, *Local Agency and Peacebuilding*, 4.

³⁷ My own use of global/international follows this. I do not use “international” and “global” as diagnoses of political realities—I do not embrace overly optimistic announcements of the development of a “global society,” nor do I accept that international politics are limited to state actors.

³⁸ This is also why the friction literature that deals with the international can be inspired by Tsing’s work which is even in its title an ethnography of *global* connections. Tsing, *Friction*.

³⁹ For example, Heathershaw refers to liberal peace as a “virtual phenomenon,” and Selby argues it is nothing more than a myth. Heathershaw, ‘Unpacking the Liberal Peace’; Selby, ‘The Myth of Liberal Peace-Building’.

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion of post-liberal peace, see Richmond, ‘Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace’, 668.

⁴¹ Randazzo, ‘The Paradoxes of the “Everyday”’, 1353 citing; Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*, 234 Emphases added. See also; Richmond, ‘Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace’, 226–44; MacGinty, ‘Introduction’; Lidén, ‘Building Peace between Global and Local Politics’.

While some of the suggested methodological orientations for this project of “accessing other narratives” will be addressed in the following chapter, for now it is important to highlight the dual understanding of the local (represented by the everyday) forwarded in these critiques. Everyday serves as a “functional description for the reality of social and political interactions,” but it also becomes more than a description when used as a “facilitator for the normative aims of an emancipatory paradigm.”⁴² Accordingly, *accessing* and *using* these local agencies actively becomes paramount in any effort to create a more effective, sustainable, and appropriate peace.

Similarly, and sometimes simultaneously to the everyday, understanding local resistance has been conceptualised as the missing local input. In this narrative, local agencies are expressed either by “resisting aspects of statebuilding or co-opting it.”⁴³ Drawing mostly on James Scott’s ideas of everyday resistance,⁴⁴ this literature focuses on “infrapolitics” that bring about “a hybrid ‘local-liberal’ peace” — a peace that comes to being when “agencies are expressed that contaminate, transgress, and modify both the local and the international.”⁴⁵

The existing literature on these moves is vast, but the steps are surprisingly simple: international designs are deemed unfit for local contexts, and the local turn is thus supposed to tap into the everyday, informal, and resistant in order to produce friction. Friction would then depart from international designs and result in something hybrid, something often imagined to be more locally appropriate, and more emancipatory. More than providing a literature review, the rest of this chapter will try to situate the local turn into a more general problem of engaging with subjectivities of the intervened-upon.⁴⁶ The next sections will first complicate the seeming novelty of the local turn by emphasising how much it is produced within academia itself, and then by emphasising the much more general and historically older connection between forms of government and conceptualisation of their local subjects. The following section will then shortly review some of the critiques of the local turn and hybridity approaches to draw out methodological, analytical, and political issues to be further discussed in Chapter 2.

⁴² Randazzo, ‘The Paradoxes of the “Everyday”’, 1355.

⁴³ Richmond, ‘Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace’, 669.

⁴⁴ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*.

⁴⁵ Richmond, ‘A Pedagogy of Peacebuilding’, 121; see also MacGinty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance*; Richmond and Mitchell, *Hybrid Forms of Peace*; Richmond, ‘Critical Agency, Resistance and a Post-Colonial Civil Society’. The most empirically rich and conceptually refined account of everyday resistance in peacebuilding can be found in the recent de Heredia, *Everyday Resistance, Peacebuilding and State-Making*.

⁴⁶ For the most recent review of the local turn in peacebuilding, see Randazzo, *Beyond Liberal Peacebuilding*.

II Complicating the move downwards

The previous section showed how local engagement becomes crucial for both practices and scholarship of intervention. In policies and problem-solving literature, concepts like local ownership and capacity building are operationalised in an attempt to disseminate *and* contextualise norms of democracy, peace, and development without imposing them onto a *tabula rasa*. Taken like this, the valorisation of the local, while promoted to the “status of orthodoxy” in international interventions, remains a failure because the deep and sustainable change that the local actors are supposed to facilitate never materializes.⁴⁷ Because of this apparent failure, many of the critiques of these concepts and practices belong to what can be called internal critique: works that have focused on the failures and limitations of the *implementation* of the concepts that are supposed to empower local actors.⁴⁸ On the other hand, more critical literature, which could be called fundamental critique in Cooke and Kothari’s distinction, has approached this move in two ways: either by emphasising that this move might be only a “cynical veneer” intended to ameliorate critiques of intrusive interventions without any respect of national sovereignty, or by reading it as a more micro, but simultaneously more intrusive, intervention in the *souls* of those intervened upon.⁴⁹

The first strand of fundamental critiques argues that the move away from the Washington Consensus, marked by the abandonment of harsh structural adjustments and conditionality, is only a screen that occludes “more of the same.” By reframing actions to seemingly stay within the confines of sovereignty, the international actors remain no “less intrusive, less demanding, or less powerful.”⁵⁰ This line of critique built onto existing critical accounts of intervention which see them as ultimately supporting the interests of the Global North and transnational elites.⁵¹ Taken this way, the shift to the local is nothing but a façade that enables the same intrusiveness to survive, while negating any kind of responsibility.⁵² In short, these accounts echo the critiques of participation-based approaches to development: the preoccupation with the local focuses on individual change, rather than political contestation, and thus both depoliticises important issues, and forecloses dissent; it

⁴⁷ Kurowska, ‘Practicality by Judgement’, 4.

⁴⁸ The distinction between internal and fundamental critique comes from Cooke and Kothari, ‘Participation as Tyranny’, 4–7.

⁴⁹ Some also read it as a combination of the two, see Miklian, Lidén, and Kolås, ‘The Perils of “Going Local”’.

⁵⁰ Kurki, *Democratic Futures*, 230.

⁵¹ Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*; Robinson, ‘Globalization, the World System, and “Democracy Promotion” in U. S. Foreign Policy’; Robinson, ‘Promoting Polyarchy: 20 Years Later’; Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*.

⁵² Joseph, ‘Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism’; Chandler, *Empire in Denial*.

homogenizes the local through concepts like community (or local ownership, capacity building, or civil society); and it uses the language of emancipation to further incorporate the Global South into the same old projects of capitalist modernisation (or liberal peace.)⁵³ In short, the intervention's primary goal remained the same—disciplining—even though the discipline is served through different means.⁵⁴

The second strand of fundamental critique takes the effects of the local turn more seriously and reads it as a reorientation from targeting the states, to targeting the individual subjectivities of the population itself. The sentiment is captured well in Mark Duffield's analysis of the development apparatus which underwent a dramatic change: from focusing on “economic growth in the hope that development will follow” to targeting “whole societies and the behaviour and attitudes of people within them” and working “to change indigenous values and modes of organisation and replace them with liberal ones.”⁵⁵ This not only changes the conceptualisations of local social relations, but also empties out concepts like democracy which are now abandoned as universal ideals and expected to be moulded onto local contexts.⁵⁶ Instead of changing the nature of global capital, or adapting societies to better deal with it through state policies, governance targets the micro-level and the everyday in hopes that those lagging behind will adapt themselves and create forms of government that are appropriate for them. This not only allows the exploitation to continue as the above critiques would suggest, but it also allows international actors to exert control of more and more areas of life.

While reading the move in different light, both these critiques rightly problematise the motivations of the seemingly radical transformations of the intervention machine: is it *really* concerned with the well-being of the population and the individuals? However, while both interpretations moved the debate in ways that importantly informed both academic and practice discussions, trying to determine one true reading might present a dead-end at this point.

To avoid having to decipher the motives of international actors which are necessarily varied, I am not so much concerned whether we see *more* local ownership or not—as John

⁵³ This summary of critiques is provided in Williams, ‘Evaluating Participatory Development’. However, the same article also challenges the depoliticisation critique in a number of ways. For the most famous exposition of the depoliticisation thesis, see Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.

⁵⁴ Abrahamsen, ‘African Democracy’.

⁵⁵ Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*, 42.

⁵⁶ Schmidt, ‘From Transformation to Reality’.

Heathershaw notes, success is not necessary for discourses to be reproduced, and there are always competing paradigms that coexist simultaneously and merge pragmatically.⁵⁷ I see these developments as telling of a larger, and historically longer, connection between the individual subjectivities of those intervened upon and the policies that are supposed to govern them. This thesis goes beyond assuming and/or investigating aims, cynical or otherwise, to probe assumptions and effects. It pursues a different way of studying this valorisation of the local. Saying that it is just a cynical construct does not tell us anything about the effects it might have beyond its intended—explicitly or implicitly—consequences. As already discussed in the Introduction, the thesis aims to study and situate interventions *beyond* these narratives of failure and success.

Following this line of thought, the rest of this section will problematise the downward move while refraining from trying to uncover its true motivations.⁵⁸ In this step, I want to emphasise two aspects that are crucial for trying to better understand the relationship between intervention and conceptualisations of their targets. First, by highlighting the ability of the intervention machine to absorb critique, I want to warn against reading too much “change” into this temporal narrative of downward moves. Second, once we consciously problematise narratives focusing on disjuncture, it becomes possible to see continuities in the way that different forms of government have approached the local throughout history. Taken this way, the conceptualisation of the local for government in general becomes far greater than the literature on the local turn suggests.

i. Continuity and critique

The interplay between critique and the transformations described above cannot be overstated. While it is common to bemoan the lack of “impact” that academic work on interventions has on policy, it is becoming increasingly obvious that IR has what Roland Paris labelled “conceptual ordering”⁵⁹—“less tangible and potentially more influential” effects that intervention scholarship has in policy circles.⁶⁰ As Heathershaw has noted, many scholars work closely with(in) interventions and thus enable what he calls “hegemonic incorporation” of concepts and criticisms that turn critique into a new dogma.⁶¹ Such a

⁵⁷ Heathershaw, ‘Unpacking the Liberal Peace’, 606.

⁵⁸ I thank Berit Bliesemann de Guevara for initially encouraging me to approach this reading more critically at the first presentation of my project at Aberystwyth University, 2015.

⁵⁹ Paris, ‘Ordering the World’.

⁶⁰ Albæk, ‘Between Knowledge and Power’, 79; quoted in Paris, ‘Ordering the World’, 67.

⁶¹ Heathershaw, ‘Unpacking the Liberal Peace’, 613, 616.

process can be traced through the popularisation of Lederach's work in peacebuilding traced by Thania Paffenholz in the Peace and Conflict literature and practice.⁶² Similarly, Rita Abrahamsen has shown how the critiques targeted at the development discourse in the 1990s were absorbed in the good governance agenda that successfully repackaged the same hierarchies and unequal relationships. This, she argues, not only allows the intervention apparatus to survive without substantive changes, but it also robs concepts like emancipation, participation, and empowerment of their political potential and turns them into a tool of neoliberal responsabilization.⁶³ But more than deciding whether these concepts originate in the critiques of interventions, or their practices, it is important to note that discussions like the one around the local come to their prominence precisely because they are "filtered through the debate between problem solving and critical scholars."⁶⁴ This ability to *absorb critique* is precisely what gives the interventionary apparatus its "antipolitical" strength.⁶⁵

Once this self-proclaimed disjuncture between "business as usual" and the local turn has been questioned, it is possible to trace the role of the local in government that goes well beyond what is usually imagined in intervention scholarship. I want to draw out some of the continuities in the way that interventions framed their efforts as creating self-governing individuals and communities long before including the words local ownership, capacity building, or resilience in its policy papers. Instead of taking the local turn to be a contemporary phenomenon, this section will bring out the connection between the ways that the local is approached and governing strategies devised around it. Namely, I want to highlight that the above reading obscures the fact that the local has been observed, studied, theorised, and used since the first colonial attempts at governing populations who are unfit to govern themselves. The bifurcation of the world into those governing, and those governed, or those intervening and those intervened upon, depends on imagining the local different from those supposed to improve it. And this "imagining" is always a laborious process that did not start only with the current local turn.

The longevity of the connection between government and the local presents somewhat of a contradiction. Examining the turn to localism in development studies, Mohan and Stokke highlight this incongruity: much of the research and practice surrounding the

⁶² Paffenholz, 'International Peacebuilding Goes Local'.

⁶³ Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy*.

⁶⁴ Graef, *Practicing Post-Liberal Peacebuilding*, 24–25.

⁶⁵ Li, *The Will to Improve*, 276.

local is done in the hopes of better informing bureaucrats, that will in turn make the intervention more appropriate and efficient. This “liberal assumption,” however, “ignores the ways in which the state has used ‘the local’ politically through material and discursive practices that disempower.”⁶⁶ As an example, they talk about colonial indirect rule and the apartheid system, both of which worked through celebrating and utilizing local difference. However, their goal was not empowerment, but fuelling fragmentation and division in local politics that might otherwise develop into a political opposition.⁶⁷

Similarly, hybridity is supposed to make the liberal peace project more “context responsive” by engaging local cultures, traditions, and knowledge. However, Suthaharan Nadarajah and David Rampton stress that by positing this hybridity as a “universalising ambition” that works to ensure peace through “context specific and mutually accommodative interfacing of the international and the local,” we are seeing a rendition of imperial orders that utilized the notion of indirect rule—“a practice of government which worked through institutions that relied on what were thought to be indigenous customs and structures of authority.”⁶⁸ Hybridity is similarly imagined to come to being through local adaptations of international designs.

Local ownership, as the source of hybridising international designs, has also been analysed in its relation to colonial rule. Its genealogy can be tracked to the 1940s in discussion of colonial administration—local ownership is to liberal peace what “allegiances with local powers” were to indirect rule.”⁶⁹ In this analysis then, indirect rule does not end with the end of colonial administrations. On the contrary, the practice of indirect rule continued through projects like development and liberal peacebuilding that seek to “assist, advise, and constrain the conduct of postcolonial states.”⁷⁰ However, while these authors rightly highlight how the use of supposedly new and emancipatory concepts both has a longer history and can be used to fold them within capitalist or liberal peace projects, I do not wish to only emphasise the continuity of international power over local designs. Another aspect that I want to highlight is the conceptualisation of the local itself.

⁶⁶ Mohan and Stokke, ‘The Dangers of Localism’, 254.

⁶⁷ Mohan and Stokke, 254.

⁶⁸ Hindess, ‘Citizenship and Empire’, 253; cited in Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’, 56.

⁶⁹ Wilén, ‘Capacity-Building or Capacity-Taking?’, 340; Ejodus, ‘Local Ownership as International Governmentality’, 6; citing Barkawi, “‘Defence Diplomacy’ in North-South Relations”, 601.

⁷⁰ Hindess, ‘Politics as Government’, 409; cited in Ejodus, ‘Local Ownership as International Governmentality’, 7; See also Chatterjee, ‘Empires, Nations, Peoples’.

In all the different variations of localism, there is the defining assumption of the local as being *different* from the international (often conflated with the idea of the universal or the global). While this differentiation between those who need help, and those who know what is good for others, is a constant, the conceptualisation is not always straightforward.⁷¹ This operationalisation of the difference between those governing and those who are being governed can serve varying purposes, and has differed historically: firstly, the difference excused the colonial government during the era in which the goal was only to secure “extractive-effects on colonial bodies.”⁷² By positing the governed populations as sub-human and thus without hope for improvement, there was no reason for another justification of imposed rule. In the late colonial period, however, the goal shifted to ensuring “governing-effects on colonial conduct.”⁷³ This difference was now recast as something improvable. The rule was now justified not by the ontological difference between the rulers and the ruled, but by the rulers’ ability and good will to guide the subjugated populations towards progress that would one day close the gap between the local and the colonial and allow for self-rule. This end goal, of course, was never to happen in this “structure of permanent deferral” where natives were promised rights but could never achieve the maturity needed to exercise them.⁷⁴

What both of the above narratives have in common is the connection between a certain conception of the local subject, and the policy that this conception invites and excuses. This connection has been captured well in Prem Kumar Rajaram’s book *Ruling the Margins*.⁷⁵ In it, Rajaram studies what he calls “administrative government” — “a type of rule centred on devising and implementing regulations governing how we live and how we conduct ourselves economically and politically, and sometimes culturally.”⁷⁶ He grounds this type of rule in *the images of native societies* and questions how this process of imagining and knowing works to create an idea of moral and political obligations for the state.⁷⁷ The important lesson of Rajaram’s colonial and contemporary cases is that the “imaginings of native society” do not stay separated from the real world, but are “concretized into policy” with specific economic and political arrangements in mind.⁷⁸ Rajaram concludes that

⁷¹ Inayatullah, ‘Why Do Some Know What’s Good for Others’.

⁷² Scott, ‘Colonial Governmentality’; cited in Li, *The Will to Improve*, 13.

⁷³ Scott, ‘Colonial Governmentality’, 214; cited in Li, *The Will to Improve*, 13.

⁷⁴ Wilder, ‘Practicing Citizenship in Imperial Paris’; cited in Li, *The Will to Improve*, 15.

⁷⁵ Rajaram, *Ruling the Margins*.

⁷⁶ Rajaram, 1.

⁷⁷ Rajaram, 22.

⁷⁸ Rajaram, 90.

orientalism, or representation of the local, needs to be studied in its “material and social effects.”⁷⁹ This “ordering and arraying of people and things”—of knowing the local in a particular way—not only legitimizes the intervention, but also guides its specific shape and policies.⁸⁰

This line of inquiry is of tremendous importance in interventions: they depend on specific constructions of the local, its problems, and their solutions—not only to legitimize interventions for domestic and international audiences, but also in the process of creating both the policies and the objects of their policies. The point was perhaps most famously pursued in development studies by Arturo Escobar in his *Encountering Development*. Escobar explored how development discourse “colonises reality” and exposed how “certain representations become dominant and shape indelibly the ways in which reality is imagined and acted upon.”⁸¹ For Escobar, this was “the production of discourse under conditions of unequal power.”⁸² And although this “colonialist move” was identified as an integral part of colonial rule by scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Homi Bhabha, Escobar sees it as relevant for the way that contemporary development discourse makes it subjects.⁸³ Even though clearly drawing from Edward Said’s analysis of discourse, Escobar does not remain in the realm of representations, but seeks to “pay closer attention to the deployment of the discourse through practice.” He explores how “discourse results in concrete practices of thinking and acting through which the Third World is produced.”⁸⁴ In his work, the act of *imagining* the subject of development thus goes hand in hand with the *practice* of development, and interventions can and should be looked at similarly.

Within IR, Roxanne Doty summarized the power of this engagement well in her description of North-South relations. For her, these relations “become more than an area of theory and practice in which various policies have been enacted and theories formulated; they become a realm of politics wherein the very identities of peoples, states, and regions are constructed through representational practices.”⁸⁵ More than just emphasising the importance of representational practices and identity construction for international relations, Doty’s study also echoes other points that are raised in this chapter. Her selection of cases

⁷⁹ Rajaram, 90.

⁸⁰ Rajaram, 28.

⁸¹ Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 5.

⁸² Escobar, 9.

⁸³ Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes’; Bhabha, ‘The Other Question’.

⁸⁴ Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 11.

⁸⁵ Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 2.

includes colonial practice in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, counterinsurgency in the 1950s, and two contemporary discourses: North-South relations within American social science, and promotion of democracy and human rights in the Global South. The range of these encounters once again brings to the fore the *continued* relevance of knowing the local, even when that knowledge is formed through “continuity and change, repetition and variation.”⁸⁶

ii. Ambiguity of localism as its defining strength

James Ferguson, writing about anthropologies of development, rightly noted that the rediscovery of the local in the form of civil society, and later “grassroots” organising, marked a distinct shift in interventions. The problem used to be that of the “savage” where there was too much local and not enough of functioning state. Today, the “savage” is repackaged as the “grassroots,” and the problem is too much state which the local should restrict.⁸⁷ In his overview of the uses of the local in peacebuilding, MacGinty repeats this distinction when he divides the history of peacebuilding in two large eras: one in which the local was “irrelevant” and the goal was to “delocalise,” and the new era which “rediscovered” the local as a tool for improving intervention.⁸⁸ The previous section worked to undo this self-proclaimed transformation of the intervention apparatus by focusing on the continued and always relevant connection between imaginations of the local and practices that are supposed to govern it. But along with continuity, ambiguity is the second important element of this process.

Contrary to analyses such as that of MacGinty, the fact that the “old” interventions were concerned with states and worked through generalizing theories, does not mean that the local was irrelevant.⁸⁹ The policies of structural adjustment or institution building still depended on both particular representations that inspired these generalizing theories, and on reading the local in a particular way that made it legible within those theories. Today, even though the local seems to be pregnant with solutions to the problems of peace, development, and democracy, once these programmes fail—and they necessarily do so—the local is also an explanation of that failure, moving quickly from an agent of emancipation, to an obstacle to international designs. Even in times of local ownership and capacity building,

⁸⁶ Doty, 13.

⁸⁷ Ferguson, ‘Transnational Topographies of Power’, 96.

⁸⁸ MacGinty, ‘Where Is the Local?’

⁸⁹ MacGinty, 845.

the local still remains ambiguous enough to easily slip from the role of magical solution to one of long-lived irritant.

This power to continuously morph is crucial for the survival of interventions that keep falling short of achieving their aims. Kai Koddenbrock examined this process in his study of how “influential policy advice constructs a stable Congo image” and how this image turns into “recipes for intervention.”⁹⁰ An important facet of Koddenbrock’s article is focusing on the process of intervention as a “looping process” that allows the inevitable failure of intervention to paradoxically invite *more* intervention. He first unearths how reductionism and self-referentialism prevalent in policy papers dealing with Congo enable interventions, but he goes on to use Ferguson’s concept of “functional pathologization”⁹¹ to uncover two steps in a process which determines the recipe for intervention: 1) the Congolese economy, politics, and society are analysed in a reductionist manner which prescribes a specific kind of intervention, and 2) reflecting on the failures of intervention both draws from and further feeds into these reductionist images to attribute the failures to “problematic Congolese behaviour,” “wrong or incoherent focus of intervention,” “lack of Congolese capacities,” or their “problematic behaviour.”⁹² This creates a reductionist and self-referential outlook in which the “assumption that the West is able and legitimized to engage in this kind of work remains untouched.”⁹³ This process then not only enables intervention, but also excuses its failures. As such, the malleability of the local is not merely productive of different forms of government but is crucial for the survival of intervention practices.

As tempting as it is to create one master narrative as an object of critique, the power of the construction of the local lies precisely in its oscillation between tool and spoiler, emancipation and subjugation, a problem and a resource. Post-structural critiques of development uncovered how the development discourse creates local societies as incapable, weak, and in need of help. In the discussion on local ownership, participation, and resilience we see the local emerging as willing, capable, and crucial for taking action. Reading this seeming disjuncture as a paradigmatic and practical shift might be misleading—only by

⁹⁰ Koddenbrock, ‘Recipes for Intervention’, 549.

⁹¹ Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*. For another exploration of how pathologization functions in discourses of humanitarianism and trusteeship from British colonial practices to contemporary peacebuilding, see the unpublished thesis Igarashi, ‘Genealogical Analysis of the Dispositive of Humanitarianism/Trusteeship’.

⁹² Koddenbrock, ‘Recipes for Intervention’, fig. 1.

⁹³ Koddenbrock, 559–60.

putting them in conversation can we grasp the importance of what is perceived as the local for all forms of government.

III Limits to finding the local

While both hybridity and friction came about as concepts that were supposed to resolve the issue of dichotomising the local and the international and allow local agencies to affect the outcomes of interventions, they are both targets of convincing critiques. Friction is said to be lost in translation. Tsing's innovative writing that traverses sites and creatively engages with dispossession, soon turned into creating "generic typology of interaction."⁹⁴ Friction as a concept in intervention literature was thus operationalized as a tool for predicting the outcomes of the intervention, while Tsing's friction was all about the *unpredictability* of local-global encounters.⁹⁵ For example, Annika Björkdahl and Ivan Gusic's informative article on frictional peacebuilding in Kosovo, while providing rich local context, still fits local subjects into one of three options: as localising, co-opting, or counteracting global norms.⁹⁶ So even though friction is meant to destabilise the local/global dichotomy and account for power relations in peacebuilding encounters, it still depends on conceptualising local subjects only in relation to the international.

Similarly, it is now common-place to argue that the hybridity literature essentially failed because it both oversimplified the entities of the local and the international that were to be hybridized, and because it soon turned into a policy tool that was supposed to become operationalized, predictable, and planned.⁹⁷ These critiques of hybridity in IR have built on an already rich scholarship in cultural studies that has critically approached the concept.⁹⁸

Moreover, hybridity in intervention literature also subscribes to a linear understanding of development of governance—hybridity is located on a line between the

⁹⁴ Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*, 40.

⁹⁵ For an example of such a "typology" approach, see Table 1.1 in Björkdahl et al., 'Introduction: Peacebuilding through the Lens of Friction', 6.

⁹⁶ Björkdahl and Gusic, "'Global' Norms and 'Local' Agency", 266. A similar issue arises in the vast "normative power Europe" literature that similarly studies the region through its response to the EU and its norms and values.

⁹⁷ Millar, Lijn, and Verkoren, 'Peacebuilding Plans and Local Reconfigurations', 139.

⁹⁸ For a thorough review, see Werbner and Modood, *Debating Cultural Hybridity*; Young, *Colonial Desire*; Kraidy, 'Hybridity in Cultural Globalization'. Nadarajah and Rampton (2015) also draw from Ahmad, 'Whose Underground?'; Anthias, 'New Hybridities, Old Concepts'; Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura'; Goldberg, 'Heterogeneity and Hybridity'; Marotta, 'The Hybrid Self and the Ambivalence of Boundaries'; Mitchell, 'Different Diasporas and the Hype of Hybridity'; Shohat, 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial"'.

liberal Westphalian state and the illiberal state.⁹⁹ This reinforces a Eurocentric teleological view of development and robs hybridity of its emancipatory potential that lies in the possibility of hybrids falling *outside* of that line. These approaches also sneak in further normative valorisations, such as the celebration of hybrid over the non-hybrid, or the evaluation of positive vs. negative hybridity.¹⁰⁰ Space prevents further engagement with the piercing critiques that this literature has invited,¹⁰¹ but I will focus on two particular issues: the impossibility of transcending what are ultimately two different entities, the local and the international, and how this reflects on the connections that we see between local agencies and international power.

i. Location and embeddedness of local agency

As already glimpsed, many of the critiques of hybridity revolve around the following question: “To what degree does the assertion of hybridity rely on the positing of an anterior ‘pure’ that precedes mixture?”¹⁰² It is important to highlight that this assumption of an “anterior ‘pure’ that precedes mixture,” also has far-reaching consequences not only for the way that we conceptualise *outcomes* of the interventions as possible different hybrids, but more generally for the way that we *approach the subjectivities* of those intervened upon.

The view that hybridity approaches failed to overcome the binaries they sought to challenge is not a new line of argument—no matter how much they argue for transcending them, they ultimately depend on the local and the international as given categories. The process of hybridisation is usually thought to start when “[i]nternational and domestic actors enter into a bargaining relationship whereby each actor attempts to promote its own values, norms, and practices.”¹⁰³ The distinction between international actors who we might assume have “international norms” and their local counterparts is thus a starting point even though the point of the literature is to make sense of outcomes that transcend those labels. Do international actors bring in some of their “localness” or are they mechanically constituted

⁹⁹ For example, see Figure 1 in Jarstad and Belloni, ‘Introducing Hybrid Peace Governance’, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’, 56; Graef, *Practicing Post-Liberal Peacebuilding*, 30; citing Richmond, ‘The Dilemmas of a Hybrid Peace’.

¹⁰¹ For some IR critiques, see Chandler, ‘Peacebuilding and the Politics of Non-Linearity’; Laffey and Nadarajah, ‘The Hybridity of Liberal Peace’; Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’; Jabri, ‘Peacebuilding, the Local and the International’; Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism’; Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*. Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’, 50; Paffenholz, ‘Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding’, 858, 862–64; Hameiri, Hughes, and Scarpello, *International Intervention and Local Politics*, 38; Graef, *Practicing Post-Liberal Peacebuilding*, 20, 25; Heathershaw, ‘Towards Better Theories of Peacebuilding’, 277.

¹⁰² Hutnyk, ‘Hybridity’, 81.

¹⁰³ Jarstad and Belloni, ‘Introducing Hybrid Peace Governance’, 1.

products of free-floating “international discourses”? Are there no local agents that work in international agencies? And is not everyone these days at least somewhat produced by the international flows of media and ideas? Thus, no matter the disavowals of essentialising moves and cautionary proclamations, the analysis still depends on *identifying* those “pure” entities, that precede friction and hybridity, as their constitutive parts. This conceptualisation of the local still relies on positing the difference that then makes the encounter itself. This difference can be presented in cultural or ontological terms, but both similarly finish in binary thinking.¹⁰⁴ This has very political implications.

The issue of *politics* of hybridity, or the failure of hybridity to take into account politics, has been noted in both cultural studies and within IR.¹⁰⁵ By relying on cultural and ontological difference that marks separate entities, we are foregoing the opportunity to explore hierarchies that make them, and the politics within those entities. It is precisely within these politics that we can find positionings that complicate clear-cut identifications of local and international. In this section, I draw out two specific political implications of this seemingly abstract failure to move beyond the heuristic devices of the international and the local. The first one relates to the conceptualisation of the place of political agency, namely through the differentiation of the *everyday* from the *political*. The second relates to the issue of the *constitution* of that agency, namely what the assumption of pre-hybridized purity hides from our view.

In critiques of international discourses and power as depoliticising, we paradoxically once more remove local subjectivities from the discussion. In these efforts to stress the negative consequences of projects of development and liberal peace, their power is often exaggerated and results in a mechanical understanding of subject formation that folds local subjects neatly into the great intervention discourse. This interpretation offers a reductionist view of power which is all-powerful and omni-present, and as such precludes any openings for resistance, contestation, and re-politicisation.¹⁰⁶

Even when these approaches explicitly set out to bring back the local, they re-inscribe the dichotomy that renders the local as *the everyday*, while the intervention is *the political*. This line of thinking relegates the local as somehow removed from “real” politics and concerned

¹⁰⁴ Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism’, 266–68.

¹⁰⁵ Hutnyk, ‘Hybridity’; Paffenholz, ‘Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding’, 863; Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’, 56.

¹⁰⁶ Williams, ‘Evaluating Participatory Development’, 565.

only with the micro and the everyday. In the words of Sabaratnam, such treatment of the local everyday, despite its best intentions, banalizes instead of *politicises* that space.¹⁰⁷

This is perhaps most easily demonstrated by looking at popular treatments of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). In her effort “to bring hidden agencies back into the political and social world,” Stefanie Kappler investigates the hidden spaces of agency in BH.¹⁰⁸ In Kappler’s analysis, these “hidden agencies” are assumed to be *outside* of the political and social world *until* they are seen by the EU. One has to wonder why they cannot exist as political agencies outside of the EU’s view? With the best intentions of creating a framework that gives agency to the “powerless,” Kappler is reproducing the idea that these people in fact are *powerless* (she does not use quotation marks) until supposedly *empowered by EU* recognition. Thus, there can be no empowerment outside of the EU, and no agency outside of the international.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, in her focus on those hidden, everyday agencies that are important to uncover and could present an important political project if framed so, she is further removing from view the very real, political, and non-EU related mobilisations that happened in BiH at the beginning of the war.¹¹⁰ However, because she expects *hidden* resistance and *everyday* practices, she remains blind to organised political mobilisation. More than just painting an empirically inaccurate picture, this approach traps the local in the everyday and further limits its access to the political.

The issue surrounding engaging local practices and actors then becomes more than just adding detail and choosing one’s empirics. It becomes a question of conceptualising the political agencies we are engaging with. To use Jabri’s formulation “the local agency we all seek to define, should be specifically defined as *political* agency”—something that she deems peacebuilding studies as unable to do.¹¹¹ This depoliticising move has been paradoxically fuelled by critiques of peacebuilding as a governmentalizing or a depoliticising project: in efforts to uncover interventions as removing issues from the realm of the political, the local is often read as *already* emptied of politics, and thus neoliberalisation is given an absolute mandate to re-shape agencies around the world.¹¹² While the critique of these practices

¹⁰⁷ Sabaratnam, ‘IR in Dialogue ... but Can We Change the Subjects?’, 797; Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*, 27–30; Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’, 59.

¹⁰⁸ Kappler, *Local Agency and Peacebuilding*, 14.

¹⁰⁹ Throughout the book, and especially in the Conclusion, there is an implicit understanding that EU needs to “learn something” both from the specific local agencies, and the scholarship that studies them.

¹¹⁰ For engagement with political anti-war mobilisations in Yugoslavia, see Bilić, *We Were Gasping for Air*. For an engagement with the everyday anti-war practices from an anthropological perspective, see Jansen, *Antinacionalizam*.

¹¹¹ Jabri, ‘Peacebuilding, the Local and the International’, 15. Emphasis added.

¹¹² Another illustration of this approach are the examples of resistance provided in MacGinty, ‘Everyday Peace’.

remains important, it is also necessary to caution against simple rejection of local spaces as *already* and *completely* depoliticised.

The approaches that focus on how the local is made through cultural and ontological differentiation from the international can run the risk of ignoring all the other ways that the two make and remake each other through history. In focusing on the intervention as an encounter that makes the subjects, it is easy to identify local political agency by casting it as somehow isolated from international power prior to the intervention itself. As Nadarajah and Rampton argue, “the hybrid peace approach fails to take seriously the historical co-constitution of the international, national, and local and the relations of power that connect these in both peace *and* conflict.”¹¹³ It is this “historical co-constitution” that is missing when we use labels such as the local and the international—a longer view with a multiplicity of connections might help us understand how they became seen that way.

It is increasingly clear that the efforts to confine political subjectivities to the parameters of interventions is not possible, yet it is not clear how to proceed in this endeavour. This thesis builds onto existing works that have started this project: statebuilding studies that emphasise “the historicity and international embeddedness of non-Western societies” and explore these “long-term structures, cultural particularities and wider influences which reach beyond the immediate political situation, temporally as well as spatially;”¹¹⁴ decolonial and post-colonial works that see intervention as a continuation of historical connections;¹¹⁵ and the works already mentioned in the Introduction that similarly treat the Balkans as political subjects in both historical and contemporary political order.

This chapter has so far demonstrated the importance, and some limitations, of engaging with the local in intervention scholarship and practices. Chapter 2 will try to move beyond these tensions through a conversation between literature in governmentality and anthropology that has sought to differently conceptualise local agencies and global powers that engage them. But before moving on, the following section will take forward some of that analytical debate to examine “the making of the local” in practice—how Serbian subjects have been imagined in discussions on the Balkans. If I am to engage with these subjectivities, it is crucial to recognise that my own engagement does not happen in a vacuum but builds on a long history of representations of Serbian subjects in popular culture, practices of

¹¹³ Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’, 51. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁴ Bliesemann de Guevara, ‘Introduction: The Limits of Statebuilding’, 117.

¹¹⁵ Lidén, ‘Peace, Self-Governance and International Engagement: From Neo-Colonial to Post-Colonial Peacebuilding’; Rutazibwa, ‘Studying Agaciro’; Laffey and Nadarajah, ‘The Hybridity of Liberal Peace’; Rampton and Nadarajah, ‘A Long View of Liberal Peace and Its Crisis’; Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*.

intervention, and in academia. Moreover, connecting those subjectivities to intervention necessarily requires highlighting the relationship explicated above: between the representations of the local and interventions that seek to engage it.

IV Imagining Serbia¹¹⁶

The Balkans have always been made in its encounters with the West. When approaching the region, we face a ready-made selection of images and concepts that orient our ideas of what the Balkans are. This representational discourse has been examined through studies of Balkanism. Inspired by, but differentiated from, Said's *Orientalism*, the term Balkanism was developed by Maria Todorova to denote "a specific discourse [that] moulds attitudes and actions towards the Balkans and could be treated as the most persistent form or 'mental map' in which information about the Balkans is placed, most notably in journalistic, political and literary output."¹¹⁷ In addition to Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans*, other foundational works are Vesna Goldsworthy's *Inventing Ruritania*, Dušan Bjelić and Obad Savić's edited volume *Balkans as a Metaphor*, Andrew Hammond's *Debated Lands*, and works that deal with Eastern Europe more generally, such as Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe*, and Attila Melegh's *On The East-West Slope*.¹¹⁸ Said's influence here cannot be overstated—today it is understood that there exists a whole subfield which deals with representations of the Balkans as bloody, volatile, backward, and in need of supervision.¹¹⁹

Such influence of post-colonial theory requires us to ask: how post-colonial are the Balkans really?¹²⁰ While the presence of historical empires cannot be ignored, and the contemporary coloniality of power rests on Eurocentered modern power in which Europe is

¹¹⁶ The title is a reference to Maria Todorova's classic *Imagining the Balkans*.

¹¹⁷ For the original argument, see Todorova, '175-198', 205; Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.

¹¹⁸ Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*; Bjelić and Savić, *Balkan as Metaphor*; Hammond, *The Balkans and the West*; Hammond, *The Debated Lands*; Hammond, 'Balkanism in Political Context'; Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*; Melegh, *On the East-West Slope*.

¹¹⁹ There are two main issues on which Todorova distances herself from Said. First, *Orientalism* refers to a "discourse about an imputed opposition," while Balkanism refers to "a discourse about an imputed ambiguity" (Todorova, 17). Secondly, Todorova points out that Said never wanted to argue for or to reveal the Orient's "concrete historical experience," but she sought to do so through historiography of the Ottoman Empire (Todorova, 12). There are many more nuanced differences between different authors working in this tradition. For overviews, see Fleming, 'Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography'; Njaradi, 'The Balkan Studies'; Obad, 'Lessons from Europe's Antechamber for Balkanist Criticism (and Its Critics)'. Other examples include Abazi and Doja, 'International Representations of Balkan Wars'; Abazi and Doja, 'The Past in the Present'; Hatzopoulos, "'All That Is, Is Nationalist'".

¹²⁰ For a quick overview of this conversation between the 'posts,' see Moore, 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?'; Cervinkova, 'Postcolonialism, Postsocialism and the Anthropology of East-Central Europe'; Chari and Verdery, 'Thinking between the Posts'; Velickovic, 'Belated Alliances?'

always the subject, and the Balkans the object, of intervention,¹²¹ it is obvious that there is no colonial situation nowadays.¹²² However, I will build onto Rajaram's work to emphasise that even with the ambiguity of this condition, the lessons of administrative rule cannot be underestimated. Most importantly, putting into conversation studies of Balkanism with Rajaram's discussion of administrative rule allows us to move away from deconstructing these representations, or debating the (non)existence of something more real than them. Instead, we are invited to examine the "materiality of Balkanism"¹²³—not only how it is produced, but also how it translates into specific projects of government.¹²⁴ Taken like this, these representations become crucial because they are implicated in the wider dynamics of subject formation in a region that is "largely ascribed from the outside" as a socio-political space.¹²⁵

Within IR, these images are examined as they are translated into prescriptions for intervention, and many have approached the Balkans and the conceptualisations of its problems as crucial for the development of a new era of interventions.¹²⁶ More generally, peacebuilding and statebuilding literatures usually focus on the region's post-conflict aspects. However, following Berit Bliesemann de Guevara's insistence that "post-conflict is not the only characteristic that matters,"¹²⁷ the following section will trace different ways that the Balkans have been made legible to various international interventions. It will first examine the Balkans, and Serbia specifically, "in-conflict" through Lene Hansen's work on Western (non)-intervention in the Bosnian War. Next, it will focus on contemporary implications of the labels of "post-conflict," "post-communist," and "in-transition" to show some ways these labels are materialised in policies.

¹²¹ This reading of coloniality of power comes from Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality'.

¹²² There are, however, a number of authors who analyse the EU as an empire. See Böröcz and Kovács, *Empire's New Clothes*; Böröcz and Sarkar, 'What Is the EU?'; Zielonka, *Europe as Empire*; Behr and Stivachtis, *Revisiting the European Union as an Empire*. I consciously stay away from such framings: while the study of colonial and post-colonial regimes of rule offers insightful ways of approaching other hierarchies, not all hierarchies are colonial situations.

¹²³ This is directly inspired by Rajaram's critique of Said. Rajaram, *Ruling the Margins*, 89–90.

¹²⁴ Rajaram, *Ruling the Margins*; Ludden, 'Orientalist Empiricism'.

¹²⁵ Stubbs, 'Performing Reform in South East Europe', 71. Stubbs belongs to the critical/interpretive policy studies which has successfully contextualized policy-transfer and Europeanisation within the East-West hierarchies and Balkanist representations. See Lendvai and Stubbs, 'Assemblages, Translation, and Intermediaries in South East Europe'; Lendvai, 'Europeanization of Social Policy?'; Deacon and Stubbs, *Social Policy and International Interventions in South East Europe*; Stubbs and Deacon, 'Transnationalism and the Making of Social Policy in South East Europe'; Stubbs, 'Stretching Concepts Too Far?'; Stubbs, 'Flex Actors and Philanthropy'.

¹²⁶ Sørensen, 'Balkanism and the New Radical Interventionism'; Woodward, 'The Long Intervention'.

¹²⁷ Bliesemann de Guevara, 'Introduction: The Limits of Statebuilding', 117.

i. The Balkans in conflict

Perhaps the most famous and detailed IR treatment of the connection between Western policy and the ways that the Balkans are imagined is provided in Hansen's *Security as Practice*.¹²⁸ She conceptualises Western policy in the Bosnian War "as always dependent upon the articulation of identity, while identity is simultaneously produced and reproduced through the formulation and legitimization of policy."¹²⁹ Putting into conversation UK and US debates on (non-)involvement in the Balkans, with classic works on Balkanism such as those of Todorova and Goldsworthy, Hansen teases apart Balkanist discourse into three specific discourses.¹³⁰ The first casts the Balkans as the romantic, exotic, but attractive Other, which fell victim to Ottoman influence. The second sees it in civilisational terms, with a possible Balkan Enlightenment at the hands of the benevolent European influence. The third sees the Balkans as unrepairable, mired in "ancient hatreds" and irrationality.¹³¹

Similarly to the ways that colonial government repositioned itself in relation to the colonies, we see in this narrative a changing relation between Europe and the Balkans, with similar oscillation between casting difference along an insurmountable ontological gulf, and the workable state of "deferral." The added value of Hansen's study is not just a consideration of a variety of texts—from travelogues to political writings and biographies—but also her insistence on the malleability of the discourses she analyses. Once again, we see that the discourses that make the subject are powerful but never definite and can change and exist simultaneously and ambiguously.

Most importantly for this discussion, there is a particular formation of the Serbian subject that Hansen detects. In the 1990s, Hansen finds the UK and US debates revolving around variants of the Balkanist discourse—i.e. around the idea that there is something ontologically different about the Balkans that can explain the atrocities that were happening there. However, alongside this view of the Balkans as unrepairable and hence not worth intervening into, we also see an emergence of the "Genocide discourse" that breaks apart the unified Balkan subject to create two new subjects. This discourse creates a multicultural

¹²⁸ Hansen, *Security as Practice*.

¹²⁹ Hansen, 187.

¹³⁰ Travelogues make the bulk of the archive that studies of Balkanism examine. The most famous examples are Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts*; West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*.

¹³¹ Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 96. Interestingly, in the "ancient hatreds" discourse that was popularised during the 1990s and which Hansen analyses, the Balkan peoples are not written as blank spaces "without history," but with an over-determined and over-determining history written from the perspective of the West. For the importance of this process of *negation* which makes people 'without history' in the North-South encounters, see Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 11.

Bosnia as a victim, a perpetrator Serbia, and locates the conflict firmly within Europe, hence making it a European responsibility.¹³² The notable differentiation here emerges between the victims of the genocide, Bosnian Muslims, and the perpetrators of the genocide, Bosnian Serbs and Serbians. However, the assigning of blame onto Bosnian Serbs complicates the implied responsibility of the West. Blaming Bosnian Serbs does not fit the “multicultural” identity of Bosnia—and this identity is indispensable for its equation to the Western, equally multicultural self. Hence, we see a further division within the Serbian subject—what Hansen calls the “Balkanising Serbia” discourse—between the elites who can be blamed and accordingly disposed of, and the civilians who are innocent and hence can remain to make the multicultural dream of Bosnia come true.¹³³

What matters here is the duality of the national subject and the absolution brought about by a removal from politics: the abhorrent behaviour of Serbian political elites becomes ontologically separated from the *apolitical* innocence of the civilians.¹³⁴ In this discourse, the “humanisation” and commensurability with the West are achieved through de-politicisation—only by casting citizens as *removed* from politics, can they be excused from the atrocities that the region is involved in and be worthy of Western attention. Two important themes emerge here and will be elaborated on throughout the thesis. First, the importance of the “educational potential and a modernist receptivity” of Serbian people that opens the door to supervised progress once the corrupt leaders are removed.¹³⁵ And second, the idea that to *become innocent* means to *remain apolitical*. The interplay between potential and deferral, and the importance of re/de-politicisation are issues that still structure Serbia at home and abroad. Hansen’s analysis shows a different road to bypassing the subject from the methodological and analytical bypassing studied by Sabaratnam. The importance of discursively negating local agency here is pragmatic: only by casting civilians, as opposed to elites, as helpless, could one argue for Western compassion.¹³⁶

Hansen’s study more generally fits into the defining aspects of the Balkan imagery in IR—mainly its preoccupation with war and conflict. And even decades after the war, the

¹³² Hansen, *Security as Practice*, chap. 9.

¹³³ Hansen, 166.

¹³⁴ Hansen, 113.

¹³⁵ Hansen, 100.

¹³⁶ However, the analytical bypassing is reproduced in the orientation of Hansen’s study itself. Namely, its concern with foreign policy and constructions of identity as they are articulated from the West, in the West, about the Balkans, means that subjects remain not much more than imagined by the West. In her analysis, there are no real Bosnians, Serbians, or Croatians—while the book critiques the representations of those subjects, we still do not get a glimpse of their existence outside of them.

region is most popularly considered as being *post-conflict* before anything else. Sometimes this means putting an emphasis on military interventions like in Hansen's work, and at other times that means focusing on transitional justice or civil society initiatives that would repair what was broken during the war. As already glimpsed in the Introduction, my own project seeks to disrupt this structure of knowledge production about the region by emphasising both other modes of existence in the region, and other ways that the international plays a part in them.

While Serbia has been the object of Western intervention in variety of ways, from NATO bombings and economic sanctions, to technical assistance and EU rural development funds, the thesis focuses on policy fields seemingly removed from issues of war, and on time frames situated after the war-reporters have left.¹³⁷ Accordingly, the types of engagement that the thesis will follow are seemingly mundane and removed from the spectacles of bombings and international administrations.¹³⁸ I want to use the rest of this section to highlight how in addition to "post-conflict," the labels of "post-communist" and "in transition" also determine the levels and forms of engagement with the region.

ii. Materiality of Balkanism: subjects and policies of "post-conflict, post-communist, and in-transition"

The concept of *transition* can relate to a transition from authoritarian forms of rule towards democracy, the transition from a centrally planned economy to market capitalism, or even the transition from war to peace. While the first two are usually presented in a bundle, here I will focus on its economic part.¹³⁹ The fall of communism in many ways presented an opportunity for the development of what Naomi Klein termed "the shock doctrine," and Western staff and resources rushed to the East to steer this shift to capitalism that was supposed to be both comprehensive and rapid.¹⁴⁰ However, more than just

¹³⁷ For a quick overview of these more coercive measure, see Dragović-Soso, 'The Impact of International Intervention on Domestic Political Outcomes'.

¹³⁸ The international administrations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are explicitly intervening since they do not pretend to respect state sovereignty. For more on these cases, see Knaus and Martin, 'Travails of the European Raj'; Chandler, *Empire in Denial*; Visoka, *Shaping Peace in Kosovo*. Moreover, because of the presence of Islam, these countries are much more easily cast as "the Other" in the current climate of Islamophobia. For a short discussion on the importance of Islam, see, for example Rexhepi, 'From Orientalism to Homonationalism'.

¹³⁹ For a policy-oriented critique of the political transition paradigm, see Carothers, 'The End of the Transition Paradigm'.

¹⁴⁰ Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*. For a quick overview of these developments in Eastern Europe, see Chapter 1 in Wedel, *Collision and Collusion*. Wedel's work more generally tracks how Western aid worked in the East through various networks and actors. This view of a transition to capitalism as a "West to East" transmission has recently been challenged by work that uncovers transnational East-West networks that came to make the

specifying the end goal, the understanding of this space as “in transition” still filters its contemporary economic development through the prism of transitology and neoliberal economics. As Michael Pugh has argued, this means that economic problems are explained through *local* deficiencies, rather than by questioning the global neoliberal systems that Serbia is supposed to be implementing.¹⁴¹

This label also invokes a particular type of subjectivity. Since the problems of transition are not associated with the design of its programmes, they necessarily present faulty local implementation as the explanation of failure. The label “in transition” is thus underlined by a particular vision of local subjectivity that needs to transform in order to successfully practice capitalism. So even though it is concerned with the economic system, questions of personhood and subjectivity feature prominently in discussions of transition. Namely, many of the failures of the transition are explained through references to the lack of personal development and human capital—issues that we will encounter again in Part II of the thesis.¹⁴²

The region’s *post-conflict* nature invokes another specific conception of local subjectivity. Most obviously, because it is assumed that the Balkans are somehow naturally inclined to violence—either because of “ancient hatreds” and an ontological predisposition to violence, or as the consequence of the rule of many different empires—the ideas of “supervision” are never far from the international political imagination. The solution to the threat of sliding back from post-conflict to conflict emerges in the form of “soft imperialism,” or “necessary empire” as put by Robert Kaplan in a recent opinion piece in the New York Times.¹⁴³ Thus not only is the local imagined as violent, but because war looms as a threat so prominently, the erasure of local agency can be presented as an *undramatic* solution to this exceptional problem.

Another consequence of post-conflict status is the preoccupation with what Hughes and Pupavac have called “psycho-social interventions”: a specific reading of the whole population as *ill* and in need of psychosocial help. Hughes and Pupavac’ analysis of

current economic model, and the uncertainty of the end result in the early 1990s. See Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism*; Bockman and Eyal, ‘Eastern Europe as a Laboratory for Economic Knowledge’.

¹⁴¹ Pugh, ‘The Political Economy of Peacebuilding’, 24.

¹⁴² This is captured in an ethnography of a Polish factory in Dunn, *Privatizing Poland*; See also the contributions in Makovicky, *Neoliberalism, Personhood, and Postsocialism*.

¹⁴³ Kaplan, ‘The Necessary Empire’. These visions of Balkans under “supervision” are remarkably common. One of the most famous proponents of such politics is Michael Ignatieff and his concept of “Empire lite.” See Ignatieff, *Empire Lite*.

therapeutic governance in the Balkans and Cambodia includes efforts to “reconstruct culture and the *very personality of individuals* through psychosocial intervention involving both formal and informal education [...]”¹⁴⁴ Thus the post-conflict label attached to the region and the individuals that live in it both supports the narrative of an ever-expanding realm of intervention—from elections to individual personalities—and serves to depoliticise policy discussions by focusing on individual, rather than structural, problems and solutions.

Finally, the framing of the region as *post-communist*, which is more than occasionally mistakenly mixed with post-Soviet, also has specific implications for the way we imagine local subjectivity and for the policies that engage it. Perhaps most obviously, it provides a recipe for democracy promotion through civil society—something that has supposedly been completely absent during communism, and something without which democracy cannot function.¹⁴⁵ This interpretation diagnoses local subjectivities with “apathy” and lack of “civil involvement,” and offers “participation” and “building civil societies” as solutions.¹⁴⁶

iii. Political limitations of engaging the targets of interventions in post-Yugoslav spaces

The previous section sought to problematise how the Balkans are approached in popular discourse, and to push forward the materiality of those representations: how they create images of local subjects, and how these images are closely connected to interventions that target them. Here, I want to illuminate the issues of *location* and *international embeddedness* that were dealt with earlier in the chapter, as they unfold in this context.

The banalisation and depoliticisation of everyday lives are here not only consequences of methodological and analytical failures, but they become necessary to even begin to see the subjects as human. As shown in Hansen’s study, without depoliticisation, these people would be active agents in atrocities projected on TV screens around the world in the 1990s. Because the Serbian state in the 1990s was seen as monstrous, the Serbian population had to be *separated* from this demonised *political* realm to claim humanity.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Hughes and Pupavac, ‘Framing Post-Conflict Societies’, 884. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁵ For a short introduction of the concept in the region, see Brown, *Transacting Transition the Micropolitics of Democracy Assistance in the Former Yugoslavia*; Bojicic-Dzelilovic, Ker-Lindsay, and Kostovicova, *Civil Society and Transitions in the Western Balkans*.

¹⁴⁶ Buden most strongly brings about this point when he says that “[t]he repressive infantilization of the societies that have recently liberated themselves from communism is the key feature of the so-called post-communist condition.” Buden, ‘Children of Postcommunism’, 18.

¹⁴⁷ Importantly, this absolution via separation from politics is also employed by people in everyday interactions. For analyses of “apathy” and “anti-politics” in Serbia, see Greenberg, ‘There’s Nothing Anyone Can Do about It’; Helms, ‘The Gender of Coffee’.

The issue of the *embeddedness* of local subjects and connecting the local and international is perhaps best summarized by Susan Woodward when she argues that the debates in the 1990s that revolved around *whether* to get involved or not (that were so well analysed by Hansen) actually masked the way that international actors were *already* involved “from the beginning.”¹⁴⁸ Here, I do not wish to refer to just the actions of the European Community/European Union, or the dubiously well-planned recognitions of independence, but also to the geopolitical and economic embeddedness of Yugoslavia and its successor states. As we will see in Part II of the thesis, the *interconnectedness* of the local and international is something that always made and continues to make the subjectivities the thesis will explore.

Similarly to the conceptual continuities that this chapter tried to emphasise, the involvement of foreign and international actors in the Balkans also becomes most insightful once examined in light of its continuities, rather than its differences. Since the Great Powers involvement in the second half of the 19th century until today, international involvement has relied on both diplomatic (and sometimes military) and economic measures, and although such measures oscillated between more and less coercion (or between coercive intervention and “mere” interference), it was always created between the push of foreign actors and the pull of differently motivated local actors.¹⁴⁹ This thesis follows this direction and explores how the international is and has been present in lives of those who are targeted by projects that seek to foster peace, development, and democracy in contemporary Serbia.

Conclusions

While it seems common-sense that interventions should be examined from the eyes of those who are supposed to benefit from them, this agenda is far from straightforward. Critical scholarship argues that many of the approaches that valorise the local in the end fail to treat “the ‘local’ as having agency in its own right.”¹⁵⁰ Despite the intention to prioritise local agencies, experiences, knowledges, and people, many of these efforts attempt to harness the local *for* liberal peace, or I would add, *for* the intervention itself.¹⁵¹

This chapter showed that despite so many efforts to problematise the local/international dichotomy, allow more local agency, and include indigenous voices, the

¹⁴⁸ Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, 147.

¹⁴⁹ Woodward, ‘The Long Intervention’.

¹⁵⁰ Paffenholz, ‘Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding’, 859.

¹⁵¹ Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’, 60.

treatment of the local and indigenous in intervention scholarship is still lacking: it is often superficial and marginalized (not just receiving less funding, but employed to only certain, explicitly apolitical, goals), even when actively sought after and celebrated. While this work is important in bringing the everyday into the considerations of world politics, it risks reducing the local to banal observations. If we need to *argue* that “individuals have very sophisticated cognitive abilities,”¹⁵² we have to seriously reconsider our starting assumptions.

This chapter has highlighted different ways that local subjectivities have been engaged in intervention literature. Tracking the moves downwards in both practices and scholarship on intervention emphasised two points. First, the self-proclaimed transformation of the intervention machine as suddenly interested in the local is problematised to highlight how knowing the local is always crucial for the design of government. And second, even the attempts to counter the exclusive focus on the power and agency of the international prove to be limited.

These critiques of intervention often result in relegating local agencies to the realm of the everyday, thus further negating the possibility of its conceptualisation as political agency. The two assumptions to highlight here are about the *location* of political agency and its *embeddedness* in international politics. First, as the first part of the chapter showed, our efforts to bring back the local often have a counter-effect—by focusing on the everyday and emphasising the deleterious depoliticisation brought about by neoliberal transformations, many of these approaches run the risk of reifying the depoliticising image of the local. And second, such representations of the local, whether in policy or academic documents, prevent us from seeing the *international embeddedness* of local subjectivities that transcend the temporal frames of the intervention itself. It is through thinking these connections that we might be able to theorise *from* local experiences differently, rather than approaching them as tools or spoilers for predefined goals.

Finally, the last part of the chapter showed how the Balkans are usually imagined, how the Serbian subject holds a specific place in these narratives, and how the region is framed with the frameworks of post-conflict, post-communist, and in-transition. It is worth noting here a ground-breaking IR text—Elizabeth Dauphinée’s *Politics of Exile*, which used precisely an everyday subject, a Bosnian Serb translator Stojan Sokolović, to complicate both IR’s claims regarding the limits of knowledge, and more general claims around ethics

¹⁵² MacGinty, ‘Everyday Peace’, 551.

of research. Yet in her effort to complicate the assumptions of the *discipline*, Dauphinée once again constructs a subject from simplifying “balkanist signs”—“religious fanaticism, an informal economy, genocide and rape.”¹⁵³ And while she is doing important work for the discipline, one has to wonder what kind of work is done for the Stojans of the region? While IR grapples with its existential tensions, Stojan’s existence is confined to a an apolitical exile first, and then to a war criminal stereotype, removed from the political mobilisations in both his home and receiving countries.¹⁵⁴ This project is similarly targeted at the discipline, and yet it is also motivated by an ethico-political concern for representations of and engagement with the subjects that made my fieldwork—subjects whose political subjectivities cannot be confined to the labels of post-conflict, post-communist, and in-transition.

Thus, the central question becomes *how* to engage local subjectivities differently, and *what* might we learn from doing it. In asking this question, it is necessary to situate agency on the local side of the intervention. Moreover, it is necessary to conceptualise it without *bounding* it to that location and separating it from the international. The following chapter answers the first part of the question by advocating an ethnographic approach to governmentality that is better able to navigate these issues. This approach is then applied in Part II of the thesis while exploring non-formal youth education and agricultural governance in Serbia. However, the thesis also asks what can be learned from this different engagement—and it is this question that is answered in relation to agricultural policy and youth education in Part II, and in relation to intervention scholarship and its methodological and analytical debates in Part III.

¹⁵³ Zinaić, ‘The Scope of Violence’, 405.

¹⁵⁴ Zinaić, ‘The Scope of Violence’. 430.

Chapter 2

Ethnographic Explorations of Governmentality

This chapter presents my own approach to studying experiences of people supposed to reap the benefits of international interventions—an ethnographic exploration of governmentality meant to build onto the critique presented in Chapter 1. This approach seeks to *locate* political agency within the targets of international interventions without losing sight of the *embeddedness* of that agency within international politics. Following Patrick Thaddeus Jackson's observation that methodology is a key site for reflection, this chapter will not be just a straightforward presentation of my analytical and methodological frameworks, but it will draw out some of the main tensions that the project emerged from.¹ Namely, it will address the problems of studying international power through the everyday, and approaching the everyday as neither a mere instance of the international, nor a fetishized bounded local.

The chapter engages with two specific bodies of literature that are complementary on this issue: governmentality studies are accused of erasing the local in their study of how it is produced by international power, while ethnography is easily seduced by empirical details that construe the local as separated from global forces that are not directly observable. The chapter proceeds in three parts. The first part presents governmentality as a concept which connects subjectivities and forms of government. The usual explanation for the proliferation of governmentality studies in IR relates issues of accessibility and translation. While the first interdisciplinary wave of governmentality studies was inspired by the publication of the *Foucault Effect* in 1991,² the complete lectures were translated and published during the 2000s, thus opening the doors for the burgeoning field of governmentality studies and their adoption within IR. While the accessibility of the lectures definitely encouraged the use of governmentality, I think there is also a more substantive explanation. Namely, as we saw in Chapter 1, there is a growing concern of the world order with the inner world of individual subjects—this has naturally drawn attention to the concept that explicitly deals with connecting power and subjectivities.

¹ Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations*; cited in Aradau and Huysmans, 'Critical Methods in International Relations', 597.

² Foucault et al., *The Foucault Effect*.

Instead of using governmentality as a ready-made concept, this section will also engage with its critics to highlight tensions that are productive for this project. It will focus on two specific issues: (1) how the operation of power is shaped by politics and power hierarchies, and (2) how to avoid an overly neat account which in its critique of international power forgets and thus erases local agency.

I explore these issues further through an ethnographic methodology. The second part of the chapter defines ethnography not only as a method, but as an orientation that complicates how we conceptualise the objects of our study, and our own relations to them. This section further draws on debates in anthropology to highlight the difficulty of treading a fine line between centring target experiences, and fetishizing localness. It complicates the view of the local as culturally and temporally bounded and cast as ontologically different, and it also argues against the erasure of the researcher in favour of ethnographic reflexivity and situatedness.

Finally, the third part of the chapter presents a framework that uses concepts of programs, practices, and effects of government in order to explore how subjectivities engage, and are engaged by, international interventions.

I Governmentality

A project that is interested in the connection between subjectivities and forms of government invites the work of Michel Foucault, whose main objective was the exploration of different kinds of subjectifications.³ The concept of governmentality inspired a rich literature within IR that focuses on how conduct is conducted through the design of freedom rather than coercion, and an already vast array of criticism.⁴ Before moving on to present how I engage with governmentality, this section will try to summarize those critiques in two main camps: those that critique governmentality studies as unable to consider *structural conditions* in which government happens, and those that focus on the conspicuous absence of *agency* in accounts of governmentality. This division is telling in itself: a concept whose main

³ Kelly points out the difference between subjectification (subjection) and the more active self-regulating subjectivation. Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, 87–89; cited in Kiersey, 'Neoliberal Political Economy and the Subjectivity of Crisis', 366, note 8.

⁴ Death, 'Governmentality at the Limits of the International'; Vraiti, 'Universal but Not Truly "Global"'; Selby, 'Engaging Foucault'; Joseph, 'The Limits of Governmentality'; Walters, *Governmentality*; Chandler, 'Critiquing Liberal Cosmopolitanism?'; Chandler, 'Globalising Foucault'; see also the forums in Kiersey and Weidner, 'Special Issue: Foucault and International Relations'; Huysmans, 'Forum'; Shani and Chandler, 'Forum - Assessing the Impact of Foucault on International Relations'; Albert and Lenco, 'Forum—Foucault and International Political Sociology'.

strength is supposed to be connecting the micro and the macro, is perceived as missing both. The chapter proceeds with taking both of these critiques seriously. Moreover, instead of trying to find out what the “correct” use of the concept of governmentality might be, or what Foucault *really* meant by it, this short review of literature serves more to *orient* my own analytical and methodological approach that is born out of these tensions. In short, I think that it is precisely these anxieties that make governmentality a concept able to start what Michael Merlingen referred to as creating “a powerful critical sociology that pulls the analysis of subjectivity into the exploration of world order.”⁵

i. Governmentality defined

Despite the proliferation of the concept and the discussions on its “true” meaning that will be partially presented below, Foucault’s own use of the term governmentality was ambiguous. In a short book that critically introduces the concept and the literature that it inspired, William Walters finds three distinct ways in which Foucault uses the notion of governmentality: 1) the conduct of conduct between the two extreme poles of “strategic relations” and “states of domination,”⁶ 2) governance of and by states in exploring “the conditions of the possibility of modern state” and 3) a particular set of governmental techniques employed since the end of eighteenth century—what Foucault calls liberal governmentality.⁷ My own approach falls within the first category: I use governmentality to examine connections between *subjectivities* and different forms of *government*, while I qualify those practices that seek to govern through *freedom* as *(neo)liberal* governmentality.⁸

Anywhere on the line between strategic relations and states of domination, the defining characteristic of governmentality as a form of power is its concern for the everyday of the subjectivities which it engages.⁹ To cite Foucault, governmentality “is a form of power which makes individuals subjects.”¹⁰ It is this focus on the connection between *everyday subjectivities* and the *power* that shapes them, that inspired the use of governmentality in this project. Foucault recognized three distinct “modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects.” *Modes of inquiry* are those that operate under the status of sciences, thus

⁵ Merlingen, ‘Monster Studies’, 273–74.

⁶ Foucault, ‘The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom’, 299; cited in Walters, *Governmentality*, 11.

⁷ Walters, *Governmentality*, 11–12.

⁸ My use of term “government” here is close to that of “governance” used by some governmentality scholars. I use “government” as the practice of the art of government: more than supervision, it implies intervention to achieve governmental ideals in multiple and varied spheres. Foucault discusses this in *Birth of Biopolitics*.

⁹ Vradi, ‘Universal but Not Truly “Global”’, 50.

¹⁰ Foucault, ‘Subject and Power’, 781.

creating, for example, the speaking subject of linguistics, or the labouring subject of economics. *Modes of dividing practices*, or disciplines, divide the subject either from others or within itself, thus creating the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy. And lastly, there are those modes which human beings use to *turn themselves into subjects*, for example as subjects of sexuality.¹¹

This conceptualisation allows us to trace the concern with subjectivation not only through the lectures on governmentality, but through different stages in Foucault's work: from investigating scientific fields of linguistics, biology, and economics in *The Order of Things* and *Archaeology of Knowledge*, to the dividing disciplines of the prison in *Discipline and Punish*, and the final volume of *History and Sexuality: The Care of the Self*.¹² Moreover, it situates his lectures on governmentality, *Security, Territory, Population* and *Birth of Biopolitics*, given in the period between 1977 and 1979, as the bridge between the concern with macro processes of the formation of regimes of truth and discipline, to the mundane practices which individuals use to turn themselves into subjects.¹³

Governmentality then has a “mediating function” that is twofold: it firstly mediates between power and subjectivity to study how techniques of rule are tied to “technologies of the self”¹⁴ and how forms of political government translate to “processes by which the individual acts upon himself;”¹⁵ secondly, it highlights the relationship between techniques of power and forms of knowledge which make government possible.¹⁶

Following the three different modes of subjectivation Foucault uses, we can see how international interventions operate in those three modes.

a. Sciences

Whether it is development, liberal peace, democratisation, environmentally sustainable development, or peacebuilding, all of these concepts have been working through their own epistemic communities—what Foucault referred to as “modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences.”¹⁷ This mode of subjectivation is detailed, for example, in Arturo Escobar's investigation of how the development discourse has managed

¹¹ Foucault, 777–78.

¹² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Care of the Self*.

¹³ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

¹⁴ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Care of the Self*.

¹⁵ Foucault, ‘About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self’, 203.

¹⁶ Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke, *Governmentality*, 2.

¹⁷ Foucault, ‘Subject and Power’, 777.

to “colonise reality;” how it works through the discourse of good governance and technologies of democratisations; how experts create specific images of countries and regions which enable developmental thinking and doing; and how developmental thinking empties projects of politics.¹⁸ Interestingly, this is one area which even those critiquing the “internationalisation” of governmentality studies consider an important and successful contribution.¹⁹

b. Disciplines

All these rationalities are born out of practices of disciplining, rendering some subjects, be it regions, states, populations, or individuals, deficient, abnormal, and targeted for reform. Tore Fougner, for example, has shown how annual competitiveness reports produced by organisations like the World Economic Forum and the International Institute for Management Development govern states by both constituting them as market subjects, and conducting their conduct through designing their freedom.²⁰ Oded Löwenheim also provided a detailed analysis of the ways in which power and knowledge are connected in various governance indicators.²¹ The array of tools used for benchmarking today is astounding in itself: Freedom House ratings, corporate credit house ratings, corruption indices, human happiness measurement. Even the recent peace index is just the tip of the disciplinary iceberg creating an “indefinite discipline: an interrogation without an end.”²²

c. Self-objectifying practices

Foucault’s later work focused on “the way a human being turns himself into a subject.”²³ This aspect is curiously missing from most studies of intervention. This can be explained by the textual bias of governmentality studies: because scholars examine mostly official policies and assume subjectivities produced in their response, there is little discussion of how individuals are actually attached to those policies on the ground. This is perhaps most easily seen in works on civil society—studies that focus on how interventions work through fostering a specific conception of political life and a specific vision of civil society. These

¹⁸ Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 5; Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy*; Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*; Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.

¹⁹ In addition to Escobar and Ferguson, Selby, ‘Engaging Foucault’, 333; cites Marc DuBois, ‘The Governance of the Third World’; Brigg, ‘Post-Development, Foucault and the Colonisation Metaphor’; Edkins, *Whose Hunger?*

²⁰ Fougner, ‘Neoliberal Governance of States’.

²¹ Löwenheim, ‘Examining the State’.

²² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 227.

²³ Foucault, ‘Subject and Power’, 778.

studies examine policy documents and rely on civil society organisations (CSOs) *actively* participating in technologies presented in those documents, such as calls, evaluations, competitions and so on—this in turns makes them neoliberal subjectivities.²⁴ However, there is little exploration of what actually happens with the everyday of CSOs, or how CSOs are made into a concept that captures human practice. Besides demonstrating the textual bias of governmentality studies, this exclusion is also due to a general lack of concern for subjects of governmentality, an issue that will be discussed in detail below.

ii. Critiquing international governmentality²⁵

Governmentality has been used widely to study international politics. It is employed to explain EU's democracy promotion,²⁶ building states and civil societies in Africa,²⁷ global governance,²⁸ liberal peace and development,²⁹ Europeanisation,³⁰ the emergence of a European civil society,³¹ European peacebuilding missions,³² and, more broadly, how global spaces are imagined and governed through using concepts like security, world order, global networks, European integration, and ethical capitalism.³³

The proliferation of these projects, and the ambiguity of the concept itself, have sparked debates on the “proper” application of governmentality in IR. The debates are telling of a larger divide among those who use Foucault's work to interrogate global politics. On the one hand, there is a growing literature that combines governmentality with other, increasingly Marxist and critical realist, insights to reach “grand” conclusions about the new workings of the global order. On the other hand, there are those more “conventional”

²⁴ Malmvig, ‘Free Us from Power’; Kurki, ‘Governmentality and EU Democracy Promotion’; Tagma, Kalaycioglu, and Akcali, “‘Taming’ Arab Social Movements’.

²⁵ This is far from an exhaustive list. For a good overview of what Walters calls the “international governmentality studies constellation,” see Walters, *Governmentality*, chap. 3. For an engagement with various critiques of IR's use of governmentality, see Vrasti, ‘Universal but Not Truly “Global”’.

²⁶ Kurki, *Democratic Futures*; Kurki, ‘Governmentality and EU Democracy Promotion’; Tagma, Kalaycioglu, and Akcali, “‘Taming’ Arab Social Movements’; Malmvig, ‘Free Us from Power’.

²⁷ Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy*; Abrahamsen, ‘African Democracy’; Gabay and Death, *State-Building and Civil Society in Africa*; Death, ‘Governmentality at the Limits of the International’.

²⁸ Lipschutz and Rowe, *Globalization, Governmentality and Global Politics Regulation for the Rest of Us?*; Enroth, ‘Governance: The Art of Governing after Governmentality’.

²⁹ Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*; Dillon and Reid, ‘Global Governance, Liberal Peace, and Complex Emergency’; Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*; Richmond, ‘The Problem of Peace’; Duffield, ‘Getting Savages to Fight Barbarians’.

³⁰ Diez, ‘Constructing the Self and Changing Others’; Walters and Haahr, *Governing Europe*; Huysmans, ‘A Foucaultian View on Spill-Over’.

³¹ Kutay, *Governance and European Civil Society*.

³² Merlingen and Ostrauskaite, *European Union Peacebuilding and Policing Governance and the European Security and Defence Policy*.

³³ Larner and Walters, *Global Governmentality*; Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke, *Governmentality*.

governmentality scholars whose empirical accounts showcase how power is executed through pairing particular political rationalities with different political technologies. This “curious bifurcation in Foucauldian interpretations of world politics”³⁴ has not gone unnoticed: Thomas Lemke differentiates between sweeping sociological narratives and detailed empirical studies;³⁵ William Walters talks about the importance of bridging the concern with empirical detail with an interest in the “bigger picture;”³⁶ Laura Zanolli differentiates between those using governmentality as a heuristic and those using it as a descriptive device;³⁷ and Michael Merlingen contrasts the less critical and more reader-friendly discourse analysis with the more critical and less reader-friendly studies of biopower.³⁸

The following section continues along these lines and will provide a short overview of critiques along two camps: one strand of literature, that might be considered more conventional governmentality studies, is criticized for their “flat ontologies” which do not inquire into structural conditions. The second strand of literature, on the other hand, focuses on the grand narratives of capitalism and neoliberalism, but often remains blind to micro practices that sustain them, and perhaps more importantly, to the everyday day actors that live, make, and complicate them. The end result is a curious situation which sees governmentality studies devoid of both structures and agents of international politics.

a. Erasing structures

This line of criticism accuses governmentality studies of being unable to deal with “the structural dimensions of power, as well as the specificity and irreducibility of the international.”³⁹ They start from the famous interpretations of Foucault’s work on governmentality that subscribes to what they refer to as a “flat ontology.” For example, the idea of analytics of government, elaborated by Mitchell Dean in his seminal work in 1999,⁴⁰ is in line with Nikolas Rose’s⁴¹ idea that governmentality should abstain from trying to create grand theories or new sociologies of governance—it should be contained to a “particular

³⁴ Merlingen, ‘Monster Studies’, 273.

³⁵ Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke, *Governmentality*, 16.

³⁶ Walters, *Governmentality*, 111.

³⁷ Zanolli, ‘Governmentality, Ontology, Methodology’, 289.

³⁸ Merlingen, ‘Applying Foucault’s Toolkit to CSDP’, 189–90.

³⁹ Selby, ‘Engaging Foucault’, 326.

⁴⁰ Dean, *Governmentality*.

⁴¹ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 19.

stratum of knowing and acting”—remaining provisional and decidedly empirical while eschewing realist ontologies and explanations.⁴²

This approach to governmentality, however, has received a spate of criticism from both within and outside of IR.⁴³ Outside of IR and as early as 1995, Bruce Curtis found that Rose and Miller’s focus on governmentality solely as technical devices cannot be productive because of its blindness to interests and intentions of different social actors. To quote his illustrative example: what can we learn from identifying a school curriculum with the goal of creating a sense of “pride in nation” as a mere technical device without considering the *goals* of educational planners?⁴⁴ Similarly, what can we tell about the working of global governance, benchmarking of political and economic performance, and practices that turn states and their populations into targets, if we do not consider the power relations that make them possible and are reproduced in the process?⁴⁵

This issue is summarised in the difference between the *how* of power—the realm of governmentality, and the *why* of power—seemingly the goal of “real” IR. However, there is more at stake here than the difference between *explaining* and *understanding* as goals of inquiry. The consideration of “the structural dimensions of power” both points to the issues of *scaling up* of governmentality, and limits its conceptual utility to localities that function with “advanced liberal rule.”⁴⁶ Here, limits to “scaling-up” governmentality to explain international politics are found precisely in the structural inequalities that are present in the *uneven* international, and missing from the domestic sphere that Foucault was concerned with.⁴⁷

Structures are invoked again when trying to explain why liberal advanced rule is not present globally, even if we agree that international agencies such as the World Bank and IMF try to govern through employing governmental techniques. In this case, we are faced

⁴² Osborne, ‘Techniken und Subjekte: Von den “Governmentality Studies” zu den “Studies of Governmentality”’; cited in Bröckling, Krasemann, and Lemke, *Governmentality*, 16.

⁴³ Frauley makes a convincing case that Rose and Miller are more responsible for this reading than Foucault himself, and that more attention to his archaeological works would lead to a realist ontology. See ‘The Expulsion of Foucault from Governmentality Studies’.

⁴⁴ Curtis, ‘Taking the State Back Out’, 583.

⁴⁵ Selby translates these concerns to IR well: “The notion of ‘governmentality’, for example, while it can shed light on how populations are administered and subjects are constituted in, say, modern Turkey, or can point us towards the novel mechanisms by which the New Partnership for African Development is attempting to self-discipline African states into ‘good governance’, cannot itself be used to explain why the Turkish state is more governmentalized than the Syrian one, why there is so much ‘bad governance’ in Africa specifically, or indeed what the purposes and objectives of governmentality are.” Selby, ‘Engaging Foucault’, 337.

⁴⁶ Joseph, ‘The Limits of Governmentality’.

⁴⁷ Joseph, ‘Governmentality of What?’, especially 225.

with *attempts of applying governmentality*, and the *failures of this application*.⁴⁸ This approach sees places outside advanced liberalism—such as the Middle East, or the varyingly democratic Balkans—as failed attempts of ruling through freedom, and make the difference between developed and developing countries the analytical fault-line for governmentality studies.⁴⁹ Furthermore to explain those different outcomes in different parts of the world, we have to examine “conditions of possibility” and “underlying social relations” that make governmentality fail or succeed.⁵⁰

These issues are now well rehearsed in what can be described as a Marxist critique of international governmentality studies. To summarise, the critique starts from the observation that Foucault was concerned primarily with how power works in the domestic arena—homogenous and liberal, and thus it cannot be unproblematically scaled-up to talk about the international realm, marked by its unevenness and anarchy.

b. Erasing subjects

Perhaps surprisingly, alongside an inability to capture structural conditions, governmentality studies have similarly been accused of erasing the other side of the social world, namely the subjects. Nicholas Kiersey offers a useful summary of different starting points to this critique when he differentiates between a Marxist and a communitarian critique of IR governmentality studies,⁵¹ and the following section will add the recent decolonial critique to this list. But before we move on, it is useful to clarify what the implied relationship between subjects and power is when one invokes governmentality.

Neoliberal governmentality denotes a specific shift in an understanding of the subject—instead of the rights bearing subject of classical liberalism, we are faced with a responsibility bearing subject. The move is a consequence of the market rationality that forms the basis of neoliberalism. As already mentioned in the Introduction, the enterprise form subsumes not only all social relations, but also subjectivity itself.⁵² Self-enterprising individuals are not coerced into conforming, but controlled “through the organised proliferation of individual difference in an economized matrix” that promotes the “rolling back of the frontiers of the state, its promotion of marketized social institutions and its inculcation of a vigorous materialist individualism.”⁵³ Thus profound shifts in the most

⁴⁸ Joseph, 240.

⁴⁹ For an elaboration of this argument, see Vraști, ‘Universal but Not Truly “Global”’, 54–55.

⁵⁰ Joseph, ‘Governmentality of What?’, 240–41.

⁵¹ Kiersey, ‘Neoliberal Political Economy and the Subjectivity of Crisis’.

⁵² McNay, ‘Self as Enterprise’, 56.

⁵³ McNay, 56, 60.

intimate understanding of the self and its relation to others go hand-in-hand with major shift in forms of government. This was observed powerfully with the introduction of capitalist markets and democracy in post-communist Eastern Europe. In the words of Elizabeth Dunn, “the successful creation of market economy requires changing the very foundation of what it means to be a person.”⁵⁴

Government then happens through a myriad of everyday choices that subjects make towards “the avoidance of risk and the maximization of their own happiness”: choosing employment, accepting risk, writing a competitive CV, investing in friendships that have a future, evaluating compatibility with partners, rewarding flexibility, appraising consumption patterns, and nurturing specific work habits.⁵⁵ All of these are techniques through which neoliberalism formats individuals. Subjectivity then, becomes a means of control, or as Lois McNay puts it, “[i]ndividual autonomy becomes not the opposite of, or limit to, neoliberal governance, rather it lies at the heart of its disciplinary control.”⁵⁶ This complicates any ideas of resistance—a topic we will touch upon in Chapters 4 and 5—but it also invites critiques of erasing agency more generally.

When discussing the Marxist critique, Kiersey moves it in a particularly productive direction because he does not include only criticisms from Selby and Joseph that were touched upon in the previous section, but he engages with Ian Bruff’s work that finds a commonality between Marxist and Foucauldian approaches—namely, they are both reductionist in that they offer a “totalising ontology” which reduces human practice to just a product of capitalist or power relations.⁵⁷ Marxists insist that all human action is a product of capitalist relations, while Foucauldians insist that all human action (that in turn produces subjects themselves) is a consequence of power relations. Thus, the fluidity usually associated with governmentality approaches that see power everywhere and in everything and is hailed as “epistemological modesty,” actually becomes “epistemological austerity.”⁵⁸ Any kind of investigation of how the subjects might participate themselves in their own making is precluded by a focus on power relations—“there is only one way to know about the world—no other aspects of human existence need be considered.”⁵⁹ Thus, Foucauldian

⁵⁴ Dunn, *Privatizing Poland*, 56. See also the edited volume Makovicky, *Neoliberalism, Personhood, and Postsocialism*.

⁵⁵ McNay, ‘Self as Enterprise’, 61.

⁵⁶ McNay, 62.

⁵⁷ Bruff, ‘The Totalisation of Human Social Practice’, 341.

⁵⁸ Bruff, 334.

⁵⁹ Bruff, 344.

approaches turn the subject into a passive “vehicle for power relations.”⁶⁰ This creates an outline which “asserts an uncompromising framework of the social and tends to elide the particular in human practice.”⁶¹ This tension between investigating subjects, and power that approaches them, will play a crucial role in the second part of the chapter that will present ethnographic meta-methodological reflections on the same issue.

The communitarian line of critique, started by David Chandler’s contribution to *International Political Sociology*, and continued in the subsequent forum in *Global Society*,⁶² focuses on the importance of the political subject for both those who celebrate post-territorial politics, namely liberal cosmopolitans, and those who radically critique it, namely those who use a governmentality or a biopolitical approach to world politics.⁶³ The critique proceeds in straightforward moves: 1) both liberal cosmopolitan and radical biopolitical approaches base their argument on the rejection of state-based communities, without any effort to imagine the alternative; 2) by doing so, they abandon the figure of the liberal rights-bearing subject and thus break the connection between citizenship and political community, 3) this eradicates the “mediating links of political community” and empties politics of subjects and hence meaning.⁶⁴ The individualisation and de-politicisation are thus not the results of “effervescent and imperialistic liberalism” as Foucauldian scholars might make us think, but they are a much more disappointing result of a general “check out” of subjects whose leaders were unable to offer a coherent liberal program that would serve as a basis of a *political community*.⁶⁵ So the choice of seeing the new post-statist world order as inherently liberal and celebrating the power of global civil society, or as an Empire engulfing the totality in its biopolitical power, becomes a matter of not much more than the starting positions of the critics involved, since it is not grounded in any empirical considerations.⁶⁶ The basic premise is the same—the political subject is lost.

At the time of publication, Chandler’s criticism was seen as an attack on governmentality studies and another “interrogation” or “trial” for Foucauldian inspired scholarship.⁶⁷ While I do not read such intentions in this work, it is nevertheless impossible

⁶⁰ Bruff, 343–47; cited in Kiersey, ‘Neoliberal Political Economy and the Subjectivity of Crisis’, 371.

⁶¹ Kiersey, ‘Neoliberal Political Economy and the Subjectivity of Crisis’, 371.

⁶² Kiersey and Weidner, ‘Special Issue: Foucault and International Relations’.

⁶³ Chandler, ‘Critiquing Liberal Cosmopolitanism?’

⁶⁴ Chandler, 56.

⁶⁵ Kiersey, ‘Neoliberal Political Economy and the Subjectivity of Crisis’, 375.

⁶⁶ Chandler, ‘Critiquing Liberal Cosmopolitanism?’, 57.

⁶⁷ Debrix, ‘We Other IR Foucaultians’; Rosenow, ‘Decentering Global Power’.

to neglect the overwhelmingly liberal character of Chandler's vision of politics. This vision of the desired political subject is constrained—in a way, it is reminiscent of what Sabaratnam identified as a hegemonic vision of political life that constitutes liberalism as “the only relevant frame of politically relevant being.” This frame acknowledges political being only insofar as it is based on the concept of an “individualist secular citizenship”—a proper liberal subject.⁶⁸ In her work on decolonial strategies in IR, Sabaratnam clearly argues against such an approach that would suppress any political being outside the specific liberal frame. Only after provincializing these hegemonic frames, are we able to open space of exploring “alternative political subjecthoods” and the lessons that they may lead to.⁶⁹ And provincializing them means engaging with subjectivities that transcend them without a priori casting them as apolitical or banal.

More than just articulating an argument *against* a nostalgia for an imagined liberal subject, Sabaratnam's work directly engages governmentality studies when she summarises them as analytically bypassing subjects. This decolonial critique argues that since governmentality approaches privilege “a specific modality of *power* that works through the production of volition rather than coercion or loyalty,” the *subjects* that are engaged by power are analytically missed in the framework.⁷⁰ In a way, Sabaratnam here agrees with Chandler's critique of governmentality approaches: the view of international power as *governmentalizing* and thus subject-producing inevitably robs us of a *political subject* that would be the platform for resistance to that same power. However, Sabaratnam goes further to find similarity between Chandler's approach and governmentality approaches: they both critique the disappearance of political subjects, but they both fail to specify that it is the subject that is the *target of intervention* that is missing—Western agency and political subjectivity are still operational.⁷¹

As already glimpsed earlier in the chapter, I treat these lines of critique—Marxist, communitarian, and decolonial, as productive and instructive, rather than debilitating. In response to them, I employ an ethnographic approach to governmentality that can re-focus subjectivity in the study of governmentality.

⁶⁸ Sabaratnam, ‘IR in Dialogue ... but Can We Change the Subjects?’, 792; She cites Ayers, ‘Imperial Liberties’ for the elaboration of how a particular idea of the subject is “exported” by claims to universality and through the “democratisation” agenda.

⁶⁹ Sabaratnam, ‘IR in Dialogue ... but Can We Change the Subjects?’, 792.

⁷⁰ Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism’, 265.

⁷¹ Sabaratnam, 266.

II Ethnography

The arguments for “adding” ethnography to governmentality studies are well rehearsed: after its blinding concern for power and discourse, ethnography promises an engagement with the everyday that would break with the view of governmental transformations in “monolithic and linear terms.”⁷² The above described difficulties of thinking alongside structures and subjects of governmentality studies are reflected in their methodological orientation which is often described as having a textual bias.⁷³ Put most simply, because of its insistence on studying policy papers that are supposed to reflect power and its technologies, governmentality studies fail to take into account both the structural conditions which led to the development of such policies, and the messiness that happens during efforts to transplant those policies from paper into practice.

My arrival into the field of IR at the height of the criticisms levelled against governmentality studies meant that I always approached governmentality *through* its lacks. I deliberately eschewed programmatic documents and kept eyes open for resistance, messiness, and structures that littered the pages of governmentality critiques. This meant descending into what Foucault called “the witches’ brew of real life” and what Rose refers to as sociologies of rule, as opposed to staying at the level of studying rationalities of government.⁷⁴ Ethnography thus emerged as a methodology capable of bringing into view those things usually obscured by the textual bias of most governmentality studies.⁷⁵

However, the tensions between Foucault’s project and sociologies of rule or ethnographies of practice are undeniable. This is perhaps best captured in Dean’s response to an article advocating for ethnographies of practice.⁷⁶ In it, Dean emphasises that “Foucault is not seeking to access the complexity of everyday life but the conditions under which we form a knowledge of and seek to govern such domains as everyday life.”⁷⁷ In other words,

⁷² A similar argument is made for IR in general, as ethnography hopes to transcend IR’s “static and state-centric” perspective, with more attention to “everyday practices and embodied actions.” Lie, ‘Challenging Anthropology’, 202.

⁷³ Howell identifies three problems associated with a methodology that focuses exclusively on policy documents: 1) it reduces Foucault’s notion of discourse to mean language, while a more productive analysis would be concerned with dispositifs 2) by overlooking “minor articulations and contestation” they produce a kind of “governmentality without genealogy”, and 3) it treats it as completed and successful strategy of hiding neoliberal policies, thus obscuring the true complexity of the changing state-citizen relationship that revolves around the term. Howell, ‘Resilience as Enhancement’.

⁷⁴ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 19.

⁷⁵ For a discussion on the consequences of the textual bias of governmentality studies, see Howell, ‘Resilience as Enhancement’.

⁷⁶ Dean, ‘Neoliberalism, Governmentality, Ethnography’; in response to Brady, ‘Ethnographies of Neoliberal Governmentalities’.

⁷⁷ Dean, ‘Neoliberalism, Governmentality, Ethnography’, 359.

governmentality studies are concerned with the rationalities that guide government, not with the messiness of really existing government.

While Dean successfully presents Foucault's own work to defend this position, there is a very political problem with this stance, even if it is defended "in the original." The problem with this kind of reading is that *those determining* both the conditions for forming knowledge, and the knowledge itself, are usually far removed from *those experiencing* the practices of intervention inspired by that knowledge. In fact, such a focus is utterly incapable of addressing the decolonial critique of bypassing local subjects. Even if we were to try to bring back some agency in the form of messiness and transformation of programs on the ground, we would still end with an image of the world governed by structures imagined emerging from the West, and their particular local expressions around the world. Because of this, I abandon any insinuation of "faithfulness" to Foucault and proceed with an ethnographic exploration of governmentality. By doing so, I hope to contribute to a wider project that is not only interested in the interstices of agency and power, but that seeks to inquire specifically into the possibilities, ways, and consequences of "studying the agency of being governed."⁷⁸

But before moving on, it is not enough to just define what I mean by an ethnographic approach. I also want to review some debates about the possibilities and limitations of ethnographic methodologies. These debates illuminate some tensions present in trying to engage subjects that we might consider *local*, and how they interact with processes and powers that might be considered *international* or *global*.⁷⁹

The general rising interest in ethnography and micro dynamics of political life can be read as a part of a general move of social science towards the micro to counteract its usual preoccupation with abstract units and dynamics on a macro level. It is traced back to mid-seventies, which used the popularisation of semiotics, phenomenology, and hermeneutics to attack positivism by arguing that focusing on practice would enable reformulating "high-theory" questions from the actors' point of view.⁸⁰ This turn made it to IR in a growing focus

⁷⁸ For a formulation of this project, see the edited volume Hansson, Hellberg, and Stern, *Studying the Agency of Being Governed*, 6–7.

⁷⁹ As already discussed in Chapter 1, I do not use "international" and "global" as diagnoses of political realities. I.e. I do not embrace overly optimistic announcements of the development of a "global society," nor do I accept that international politics are limited to state actors.

⁸⁰ Marcus, 'Contemporary Problems of Ethnography in the Modern World System', 166. For an early account of the practice turn in anthropology, see Ortner, 'Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties'.

on practice and ethnography.⁸¹ Ethnographic engagement is meant to counter the usual “armchair analysis” that relies solely on language and discourse understood without practice.⁸²

My own use of ethnography exceeds the usual understanding of ethnography as implying some sort of “epistemological imperialism” with a privileged access reality.⁸³ Drawing on George Marcus’ differentiation between meta-methodological discussions that focus on the pedagogical process, and discussions of particular tactics of inquiry, this part proceeds as follows:⁸⁴ the first section will define ethnography not only as a practice, a genre of writing, or a set of methods, but as a particular *sensibility*. This sensibility complicates how we conceptualise both those we research and the researcher herself—issues examined in the following two sections. Finally, the last section will present tactics of inquiry that I used throughout the fieldwork conducted in 2016.

i. Defining ethnography: Anthropology ≠ ethnography ≠ participant observation⁸⁵

“The aim of the ethnographer is to listen deeply to and/or to observe as closely as possible the beliefs, the values, the material conditions and structural forces that underwrite the socially patterned behaviours of all human beings and the meanings people attach to these conditions and forces. When we conduct research with an ethnographic imaginary these are some of the aspects of human existence that we aim to uncover.”⁸⁶

The above distinction between anthropology as a discipline usually associated with ethnography, ethnography as a methodological orientation, and participant observation as one ethnographic tactic of inquiry (a specific “method”), captures the most important point of my own definition. I define ethnography not only as participant observation or immersion, but as a certain sensibility. This sensibility—variously referred as a particular stance,

⁸¹ Adler and Pouliot, *International Practices*, 2011; Pouliot, “‘Subjectivism’”; Bueger and Gadinger, ‘The Play of International Practice’; Vradi, ‘The Strange Case of Ethnography and International Relations’; Salter, ‘The Ethnographic Turn: Introduction’.

⁸² Neumann, ‘Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn’.

⁸³ Dean, ‘Neoliberalism, Governmentality, Ethnography’, 360. This is an accusation raised by Dean in response to Brady’s argument about the potentials of governmentality studies with an ethnographic imaginary. See the debate in Foucault Studies: Brady, ‘Neoliberalism, Governmentality, and Ethnography’.

⁸⁴ Marcus, ‘How Short Can Fieldwork Be?’

⁸⁵ I borrow this formulation from Forsey and Hockey, ‘Ethnography Is Not Participant Observation’, 72.

⁸⁶ Forsey, ‘Ethnography as Participant Listening’, 567.

imaginary, or orientation—has two main aspects.⁸⁷ First, by recognizing that the main data collection tool is the researcher herself—with all the theories, concepts, situatedness, emotions, and affects that come along with it, it abandons the “view from nowhere” and recognises that all knowledge is produced from a particular location.⁸⁸ And secondly, it is oriented towards the social world and material objects, but pays special attention to the meaning-making work that goes into creating them. This orientation allows us to more fully appreciate not just human experiences, but also how they are made through different forces that might be underwriting those experiences.

Such a definition moves away from ethnography as a *tactic of inquiry*. Nowadays, it is recognised that the grounding myths of anthropological fieldwork are ideals that might orient our practice but are never achieved.⁸⁹ The idea that we have to participate and observe for at least 12 months is disappearing due to institutional limitations and methodological reflections. The obsession with “how long”—the idea of a 12-month cycle that is supposed to offer a view of one agricultural cycle—still lives on only as a myth.⁹⁰ We similarly admit that participant observation is mostly participant *listening*, even when it is technically called *participating*.⁹¹ Most of our ethnographies are dispersed, multi-sited, and draw on a spate of methods such as ethnographic interviews, impromptu focus groups, and our own every-day observations.⁹²

Letting go of the idea of ethnography as a method of long-term participant observation, however, leads to a problem of definition. If it is not a *method*, what is it? My definition is concerned with *meta-methodological* issues in the process of knowledge production.⁹³ This section will draw from anthropological literature on ethnography to build onto the above definition and argue that the main contribution of ethnographic methodology

⁸⁷ For a discussion of ethnography as a sensibility, see Schatz, ‘Ethnographic Immersion’; Pader, ‘Seeing with an Ethnographic Sensibility’. Brady refers to it as an “imaginary” in Lippert and Brady, *Governing Practices*. Ethnographic stance is referred to in Ortner, ‘Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal’.

⁸⁸ Here, I draw on the broad field of feminist standpoint epistemology. See Harding, ‘Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology’; Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’.

⁸⁹ Lie, ‘Challenging Anthropology’, 214–18. describes other definitional features of ethnographic fieldwork and shows how his own research failed to live up to them.

⁹⁰ For a discussion around “how long should fieldwork be,” see the exchange in Marcus and Okely, ‘Debate’.

⁹¹ Forsey, ‘Ethnography as Participant Listening’; Forsey and Hockey, ‘Ethnography Is Not Participant Observation’.

⁹² The concept of multi-sited ethnography was coined in Marcus, ‘Ethnography in/of the World System’. Recently, novel methodological approaches are developed in so called “global policy studies.” A great example is Stepputat and Larsen, *Global Political Ethnography*; Feldman, ‘The Case for Nonlocal Ethnography in a World of Apparatuses’.

⁹³ Marcus, ‘How Short Can Fieldwork Be?’

is muddling the clear boundaries of concepts and subjects. Specifically, I argue that this particular understanding of ethnography complicates the very idea of fieldwork as a meeting between the *research subject* and the *researcher*, in something called the *field*. This view offers important lessons to a project that is usually interpreted as going “into the field,” to approach the local as our research subject. I hope to problematise all three of these terms by arguing that such a conceptualisation incarcerates both the subjects and the researchers. Moreover, it precludes the essential consideration of “epistemological and political *issues of location*,” by insisting on an empiricist “commitment to ‘the local.’”⁹⁴ It is against this empiricist “commitment to the local” that I define ethnography and approach the experiences of my interlocutors.

ii. Anthropology, ethnography, and IR

In his 1922 *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Bronislaw Malinowski famously defined the goal of ethnography as “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world.”⁹⁵ This view still resonates with discussions of ethnographic methods: it is through full immersion that we are able to apprehend the native’s point of view. This claim, however, has been problematised—this section will draw on those conversations to find lessons on how to approach subjectivities from which I set out to learn about interventions.⁹⁶ This idea that the finished ethnographic text somehow translates the native’s inner life into words understandable to readers elsewhere was challenged in the 1980s when anthropologists realised that instead of *describing* culture, ethnographers are actually *writing it* into existence.⁹⁷ This recognition that ethnography is never about just “recording” is referred to as “the crisis of representation,” or the 1986 moment in anthropology. The publication of three seminal volumes unearthed the politics innate to all ethnographic texts and opened the doors for experimental ethnography.⁹⁸ This moment focused on the production of text and challenged an “ideology claiming transparency of representation and

⁹⁴ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Discipline and Practice’, 39.

⁹⁵ Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, 19 emphasis original.

⁹⁶ This is a goal more modest than an overview of the “ethnographic turn” in IR in general. Excellent work on that topic can be found in Vrasti, ‘The Strange Case of Ethnography and International Relations’; Rancatore, ‘It Is Strange’; Vrasti, ‘Dr Strangelove’; Lie, ‘Challenging Anthropology’.

⁹⁷ Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*.

⁹⁸ Clifford and Marcus; Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*; Turner and Bruner, *The Anthropology of Experience*. They were later criticized for focusing only on the politics *within* texts at the expense of ignoring politics that *surround* the production of those texts. Escobar, ‘The Limits of Reflexivity’, 378. talking about Fox, *Recapturing Anthropology*. Vrasti also adds the works of Geertz on the same issue, that were published before 1986: Geertz, ‘Deep Play’; Geertz, ‘Thick Description’; cited in Vrasti, ‘The Strange Case of Ethnography and International Relations’, 282.

immediacy of experience.”⁹⁹ In general, it encouraged and actively advanced literary theoretical reflexivity.¹⁰⁰

In a scathing 2008 article, Vradi argued that the embrace of ethnography within IR can be explained by IR’s ignorance of the developments described above. Examining IR ethnographic works, she argues that IR’s “ethnographic turn” adopted a “selective, instrumental and somehow timid understanding of what ethnography is and does.”¹⁰¹ Most interestingly, instead of engaging with basic anxieties that were articulated in 1986 and which constitute contemporary cultural anthropology, IR imagines ethnography as a *solution* to its own crisis of representation. It expects ethnography to “resolve the aporias of textual representation, automatically bring about emancipation, or render political scientists reflexive.”¹⁰² Specifically, ethnography was expected to do two things in IR: to “launch an emancipatory empiricist agenda that could rescue IR from moral relativism and (re)invest it with a much-desired policy voice,” and to “refurbish the discipline’s parochial vestiges through an inter- and multi-disciplinary effect.”¹⁰³ In the section below, both of these are problematised.

Here I do not wish to examine ethnographic IR on its own, or in relation to anthropology like Vradi did.¹⁰⁴ Rather, I want to foreground a particular debate in anthropology relevant to the current project: that is, how one might approach “the local” and “the field” in which the local is supposedly to be found, while knowing that what we uncover is always just a representation. However, I remain wary of Vradi’s warning about the appropriation and big promises of ethnography—I do not expect ethnographic methodologies, nor anthropological debates, to offer “solutions” on how to approach the local. On the contrary, I use them here to draw out lessons and tools with which we might think *around* problems that are inevitable when trying to study the subjectivities of those “being governed.”¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Clifford and Marcus, 24. This further led to what has been termed post-modern or experimental anthropology, which sought to introduce methods like dialogic or polyphonic writing in efforts to question the authority of “a science that has claimed to *represent* cultures” (p. 15).

¹⁰¹ Vradi, ‘The Strange Case of Ethnography and International Relations’, 281.

¹⁰² Vradi, 284; citing Marcus, *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*, 190.

¹⁰³ Vradi, ‘The Strange Case of Ethnography and International Relations’, 295.

¹⁰⁴ For general overviews, see Wedeen, ‘Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science’; Gusterson, ‘Ethnographic Research’; For responses to Vradi, see Rancatore, ‘It Is Strange’; Lie, ‘Challenging Anthropology’; Aradau and Huysmans, ‘Critical Methods in International Relations’, 609–11.

¹⁰⁵ Hansson, Hellberg, and Stern, *Studying the Agency of Being Governed*.

The specific post-1986 developments I draw from came about from the perceived accelerations of the movements of peoples, cultures, and goods around the world that made the idea of a *local* that is somehow separated from the *global* untenable.¹⁰⁶ This obviously played a major role in a discipline where the local, or the native, has been central to its self-conceptualisation. Anthropology relied on leaving “home” to go into “the field” and study how “the others” organise “their societies.” This idea of going out into the field to study the other brought with it the assumptions that “here” and “there” reflected only features of geography. However, behind a designation of geographical location, “here” and “there” necessarily reflected difference—*here* was modern, and *there* was primitive. So to study the development from primitive to modern, ethnographers travelled and collected data “in the field.”¹⁰⁷ This differentiation brought with it a spate of dichotomies that played a part in how exactly we represent the local and the global. The global is construed as “a space that is dynamic, thrusting, open, rational, cosmopolitan and dominant while the local is communitarian, authentic, closed, static, nostalgic, defensive (but ultimately defenceless) and the site of ethnic, sexual, regional and other fragmentary identities.”¹⁰⁸ And as much as we have moved beyond the old colonial ethnographies, these meanings still lurk behind our engagements with difference. Most importantly, because the international in scholarship on intervention is represented by a vague “international community,” this literature translates the local-global dichotomies discussed in anthropology to the local-international dichotomy that makes intervention.

This view that separates the local and the global ran into trouble once anthropologists realised that globalisation is bringing societies and cultures around the world closer and closer together—the exotic “other” which was anthropology’s object of study and *raison d’être* was disappearing. As globalisation, migration, mass media, and diasporic communities brought cultures and individuals closer than ever before, anthropology was forced to deal

¹⁰⁶ Additionally, the Malinowskian goal of grasping the native’s point of view was further problematised through works that situated this project in not only innocent curiosity, but also in a colonial project of expansion. Space prevents a more thorough engagement with this history of anthropology as discipline, and ethnography as a practice of approaching difference, but I remain acutely aware of it. For key arguments, see Asad, *Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter*.

¹⁰⁷ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Discipline and Practice’, 35.

¹⁰⁸ Ley, ‘Transnational Spaces and Everyday Lives’, 155; quoted in Marston, Jones, and Woodward, ‘Human Geography without Scale’, 428.

with the fact that there is no more “unspoilt” otherness to be explored—the *field there* was starting to dangerously resemble the *home here*.¹⁰⁹

Recognizing that “otherness” itself is a construct threatened the disappearance of anthropology’s subject matter, but it translated into a vigorous refocusing from its *subject* as a definitive characteristic, to “its distinctive *mode of understanding reality*.”¹¹⁰ This crisis was never resolved and what this distinctive mode entails is still heavily debated. However, there are contributions of this debate that are relevant to this project.

This debate led to a productive rethinking of the concepts of “the field”—supposed to contain the local cultures that we study, and “home”—supposed to be separated from it. The conventional narrative of the researcher choosing a “field” which is always elsewhere and separate than “home” and thus equating the local with locality, has been supplanted by an effort to “decenter and defetishize the concept of ‘the field,’ while developing methodological and epistemological strategies that foreground questions of location, intervention, and the construction of situated knowledges.”¹¹¹ This led to insightful discussions around the tension within anthropology that at the same time rejects “the idea of the local as a bounded entity,” but relies on a method that “takes it for granted.”¹¹²

This brings us to the central question: “How [...] can ethnography—at home or abroad—define its object of study in ways that permit detailed, local, contextual analysis and simultaneously the portrayal of global implicating forces?”¹¹³ In other words, how can we both work to re-politicise the local by engaging with locations of politics usually erased from IR, and still remain attentive to ways that those locations are shaped by international power? If intervention scholarship is rushing to the local as we showed in Chapter 1, it is crucial to consider how this might be done while not losing sight of “global implicating forces.” The main tensions of this crisis in anthropology, that between studying the particularities of the

¹⁰⁹ Gupta and Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*; Gupta and Ferguson, *Anthropological Locations*; Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*; Appadurai, ‘The Production of Locality’; Appadurai, ‘Discussion’. While this was explicitly discussed in the works of scholars like Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson, and Arjun Appadurai in the 1990s, it was not completely surprising. As early as 1966, writing about modernisation and the anthropological relations to the field, Lévi-Strauss stated that “the new threat to our studies is not, then, so much quantitative as qualitative: these large populations [i.e. the ‘primitives’, as Lévi-Strauss calls them] are changing fast, and their culture is resembling more and more that of the Western world. Like the latter, it tends to fall outside the field of anthropology.” Lévi-Strauss, ‘Anthropology: Its Achievements and Future’, 124–27 quoted in; Lie, ‘Challenging Anthropology’, 208.

¹¹⁰ Marcus, ‘Contemporary Problems of Ethnography in the Modern World System’, 168.

¹¹¹ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Discipline and Practice’, 4–5.

¹¹² Gupta and Ferguson, 4; See also Amit, *Constructing the Field Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World*, especially the Introduction.

¹¹³ Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*, 22., describing Marcus’ contribution to the same volume.

local which can no longer be seen as separated from global dynamics, can offer insightful lessons for studying interventions whose core dynamic is between international designs and local circumstances they meet upon deployment on ground.

a. Subjects as culturally and temporally bounded and ontologically different

“Can we be sure, for example, that ‘the particular’ we seek to study, or the cultural worlds we presume to exist, may actually be empirically bounded? Is ‘the local’ not the constantly refashioned product of forces well beyond itself?¹¹⁴ Does it not exist only as part of a sociopolitical geography of multiple scales and coordinates?¹¹⁵ Is it not true that the singularity of places, just like the singularity of ‘traditions,’ ‘customs,’ and ‘cultures,’ is being fashioned ever more in response to the market? Surely, neat antinomies between the local and the global, between field and context, between ethnography and metanarrative, beg the very questions that we should be asking.”¹¹⁶

The insights of this crisis resonate with the issues discussed in Chapter 1, namely, they can be summarised as the need to let go of concepts of the local that render it culturally and temporally bounded, and ontologically different. It is by letting go of the idea of boundedness, contemporary or historic, that we can begin to appreciate more fully the varied *locations* of political subjectivities, and their *embeddedness* within international politics. Moreover, the issue of cultural boundedness is incredibly important for critiques of liberal peace that see “culture” as a remedy for flawed international designs. Many critics still lament the interventionist practices for not paying enough attention to local (or local-local in Richmond’s terminology)¹¹⁷ culture, and the solution is being more “culturally sensitive” or “culturally attuned.”¹¹⁸ Even hybridity scholarship relies on the concept of culture, and culturalist critiques inevitably lead to questions of origin and authenticity—who is to be considered as local and pure? Which “local culture” is to be fitted into the liberal framework to make it a hybrid?

Culturalist critiques ignore two of the most powerful insights of the anthropological critique of culture. Such readings still depend on conceptualising “the world as a series of

¹¹⁴ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*; Appadurai, ‘Discussion’.

¹¹⁵ Ortner, ‘Fieldwork in the Postcommunity’.

¹¹⁶ Comaroff and Comaroff, ‘Ethnography on an Awkward Scale’, 156–57.

¹¹⁷ Richmond defines the “local-local” as a “diversity of communities and individuals that constitute political society beyond this [elite and civil society level] often liberally projected artifice.” Richmond, ‘Becoming Liberal, Unbecoming Liberalism’, n. 2. This understanding is supposed to look for “deeper, more contextual” (Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace*, 13.) expressions of local agency, but Richmond never elaborates on what that depth might bring or what the context might be in different cases.

¹¹⁸ Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace*, 51.

discrete, territorialized cultures.”¹¹⁹ Thus the idea of bounded culture serves to “enforce separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy.”¹²⁰ Moreover, they posit culture as some sort of Leviathan standing above and magically ruling over a homogenous ground to make up “autonomous local cultures” which can somehow be juxtaposed to a homogenizing movement of cultural globalisation.¹²¹

This conceptualisation of the world as a series of bounded locals becomes even more problematic when it faces dynamic processes in which the local and international interact. This has twofold implications: it imagines intervention as the *only* trans-local force that reaches the otherwise bounded locality, and it assumes a temporality to this interaction that starts only with the launch of the intervention. As the critiques presented in the previous chapter showed, even recent studies of intervention which focus on the hybrid and the everyday, adopt a “presentist or short temporal frame” and hence end up ignoring the interconnectedness and mutual constitution of different spaces.¹²² We are not only in danger of perceiving the local as bounded from the international, but also as perceiving the intervention as the *only connection* to the international. This view does precisely what Jean and John Comaroff warn against in the above quote. It assumes that the “local culture” is temporally bounded prior to the intervention, and that it is only the intervention that binds it to global forces—thus the local which has not been touched by intervention, here representing both modernisation and globalisation, is the only “local-local.”

b. Is the local subject ontologically different?

This temporal and cultural confinement often implies an ontological differentiation between the liberal Western subjects that intervene, and the traditional subjects that are intervened upon. Terms such as the local-local reinforce the underlying assumption of ontological or cultural difference as the primary boundary between the interveners and those intervened upon. This understanding of the local leads to asking questions of limited potential like *who are the real locals?* Or, *what is authentic, as opposed to co-opted by the governmentalizing project?*

This problem of difference between the liberal subjects and the authentic others is usually resolved by the invocation of a transcendental subject that supposedly guards us

¹¹⁹ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Culture, Power, Place’, 2–6.

¹²⁰ Abu-Lughod, ‘Writing Against Culture’, 137–38.

¹²¹ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Culture, Power, Place’, 2–6.

¹²² Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’, 65–66.

from falling into the trap of ontologizing the difference between the Western and non-Western subject: we are all born equal, hence we all have the same rights.¹²³ However, such universalism is also misused to hide the particularism of the specific vision of political life that is promoted.¹²⁴ As already touched upon above in the discussion on the communitarian critique of the loss of subject in governmentality studies, this leads to the exclusion of political life which does not fit the liberal frame—a frame which hides its particularity under the veneer of universality.

This issue weds IR to early ethnographic representation in unexpected ways. Vrasti notes that this othering of political life outside of the West remains prevalent in IR that sees “pre-modern” political forms in line with early ethnographic images produced by missionaries and colonisers. These images “reinforce IR’s constitutive fantasy, namely, the idea that the ‘state of nature’ is an anarchic and barbaric realm.”¹²⁵ The questions of how to engage and represent subjectivities—those that do not “fit” into the idea of what a (Western) subject should be—then becomes crucial for overcoming these politically constitutive caricatures.¹²⁶

It is my argument here that anthropology has been sympathetic to this effort since at least the 1980s, and as such can provide valuable lessons. Addressing the problem explicitly, Ferguson and Gupta write:

“By decoupling the idea of experience from the vision of an ontologically prior subject who is ‘having’ it, it is possible to see in experience neither the adventures and expression of a subject, nor the mechanical product of discourses of power, but the workshop in which subjectivity is continually challenged and refashioned.”¹²⁷

This thesis seeks to achieve this through an ethnographic approach to interventions as seen by the people who are supposed to reap the benefits of these projects. In this effort, it is not enough to engage the local beyond essentialism or mere products of international power. We also have to go past imagining locations as culturally and temporally bounded. By accounting for historical and contextual forces that might explain the material differences

¹²³ Krishna, ‘The Importance of Being Ironic’, 387.

¹²⁴ Sørensen, ‘Balkanism and the New Radical Interventionism’, 4.

¹²⁵ Vrasti, ‘The Strange Case of Ethnography and International Relations’, 299. For more on the political relevance of the “state of nature” and its roots in colonialism, see Jahn, ‘IR and the State of Nature’.

¹²⁶ In pursuing this line of thinking, Sabaratnam shows that this engagement has to have as its basis an embodied, as opposed to a transcendental subject Sabaratnam, ‘Re-Thinking the Liberal Peace’, 96–102.

¹²⁷ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Culture, Power, Place’, n. 17.

between the interveners and those intervened upon, I hope to move beyond embracing some mythical ontological difference as an explanatory tool.¹²⁸

iii. Conceptualising the researcher through ethnographic reflexivity

The definition of ethnographic sensibility that I employ is not restricted to problematising how we might imagine the local as the object of our study but goes on to problematise “the researcher” as always connected to that object in a myriad of ways that break with the imagined cultural and temporal separation. In the words of Gupta and Ferguson, “the question of location from which anthropological knowledge is constructed must be a central one.”¹²⁹ This important dimension is not always present in ethnographic works.

In her discussion of the ethnographic work in *Peaceland*, the more ethnographic of her two monographs and perhaps the most widely read ethnography of peacebuilding, Séverine Autesserre is aware of her own positionality. She has direct access to the community she is researching, she is already “immersed,” she has relationships that will allow her to go beyond the prepared scripts that these people recite to usual researchers and she can really “get at” how the community works.¹³⁰

Yet, when talking about “theory building” and “consolidation and generalisation through fieldwork” she presents ethnography as (only) a superior tool for collecting data: Autesserre does ethnography because methods like observation and participation are the only way to access “everyday practices and habits.” In the Appendix in which she elaborates on her ethnographic approach, we are presented with an overwhelming number of interviews, locations visited, people spoken to, and ways of accessing stakeholders. Thus, despite her awareness of her own positionality, Autesserre’s conceptualisation of ethnography assumes as its defining feature not the recognition of the tool of knowing—i.e. herself, but a promise of a unique “access to reality.”¹³¹

¹²⁸ See Chapter 1, and Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’, 59; Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism’, 267.

¹²⁹ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Culture, Power, Place’, 23; they also draw on other important works on politics of location in anthropology and feminism, see Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*; Mani, ‘Multiple Mediations’; The importance of feminist authors in this area cannot be overstated, the concept of “politics of location” itself started from Rich, ‘Notes Towards a Politics of Location’. Emphasis added.

¹³⁰ She explicitly recognises these benefits, Autesserre, *Peaceland*, 277.

¹³¹ Sabaratnam takes this critique further and argues that Autesserre’s study is ultimately Eurocentric: even though she “listens” to local interlocutors, she fails to take their references to racism, imperialism, and colonialism seriously—thus finding cause of the interventions’ failures in “everyday practices,” rather than structural coloniality of power. I do not pursue this critique further, but it is worth emphasising that Sabaratnam’s observation that Autesserre’s “Eurocentric thinking is thus manifest in an ongoing and final

In terms of feminist standpoint epistemology, this view does not challenge the idea of objectivity, but argues for a “strong method” better able to achieve it.¹³² This is not exclusive to her work—in a field that is largely based on critiquing projects and expertise knowledge for not being context sensitive, the statement “I’ve been there” offers a certain epistemic legitimacy—an idea that we *know* because we have somehow *experienced* the real local circumstances.¹³³ This knowledge is the knowledge of difference—how the particularity of the local challenges and changes the universal designs of the international.

This not only reduces ethnography to a “data-collection machine capable of accessing unmediated reality in all its authenticity and accuracy,”¹³⁴ but also resonates with other sources of experience. Namely, it is easily mixed with the idea that we similarly *know* because we are somehow *from* a specific region—a fact which is also supposed to give us some unique, privileged access. Without denying the importance of context, I want to argue here that the main contribution of an ethnographic approach is *not* its privileged access, but its possibility to reflect upon issues of that access—the idea that no matter if we are at the desk, or immersed in the field, we always *know from a specific location*. This is what Jon Harald Sande Lie defines as anthropological reflexivity—“the constant and reciprocal relationship between fieldworker and informants, underscoring that the fieldworker’s position in the field influences the data that she gains access to and acquires.”¹³⁵

Here, the above mentioned “crisis of representation” becomes more than doing away with “the field” as an adventurous voyage to the “other” lands—it also instructs us to pay attention to ways in which we are not only biographically, but also historically and socially connected to the sites we study.¹³⁶ Instead of making ourselves disappear, a task impossible even with the best intentions, we are invited to reflexively consider these connections, how they influence the researcher, the research, and the researched. In my case, these connections are even more prominent as I grew up in what is today Croatia, in a region that shares the border and war history with Serbia. I travel with a Croatian passport that has free access to

epistemic alignment with the international interveners” can be actually read as Auteserre’s failure to inquire further into herself as a tool of knowing—constant reflexivity of our explicit and implicit “alignments” is a constitutive element of my definition of ethnography. Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*, 31.

¹³² Harding, ‘Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology’, 462–63.

¹³³ This is not limited to academic practice – “first hand” knowledge as a legitimising tool is also used in the policy circles. See Bliesemann de Guevara, ‘Journeys to the Limits of First-Hand Knowledge’; Bliesemann de Guevara, ‘Intervention Theatre’.

¹³⁴ Vraști, ‘The Strange Case of Ethnography and International Relations’, 281.

¹³⁵ Lie, ‘Challenging Anthropology’, 205; citing Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* especially the last chapter.

¹³⁶ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Discipline and Practice’, 38; citing Gordon, ‘Anthropology and Liberation’.

the EU (unlike a Serbian one), and my Croatian accent and dialect display my origin in every conversation I have in Serbia. However, while these facts made me a foreigner in Serbia, my language familiarity, the ability to read Cyrillic, and cultural proximity, marked me as one “studying their home” among colleagues in the UK—in the eyes of British scholars, I was doing “native ethnography.”¹³⁷

The literature on the potentials and pitfalls of this approach is numerous, but here I want to point out a few relevant points.¹³⁸ For scholars who are socialised in international academia but do fieldwork “at home,” the questions of differentiating between home and field crystalize in all their complexity: is home the Western academia which equips us with our theoretical orientations and goals, where we return to “write up” and “make sense” of the chaotic field experiences? Or do we return “home” when we enter the “field” and slip back into the language we share with our parents? Is our adoption of the role of the researcher enough to call a culture where we grew up a “site”? In this case, ethnographic inquiry stops being an unproblematic exploration of “Otherness” but enters a more complex territory.

Researchers working in internationalised academia and going “home” for fieldwork enter a “double bind”—they are perceived as either lacking the distance needed for good fieldwork and expected to minimise their local identity in some mystical attempt at preventing bias, or they are burdened with the responsibility to “speak their identity,” thus turning their origins into a form of essentialism.¹³⁹ This conceptualisation does more than highlight the experiences of these researchers, it also uncovers the underlying assumptions of objectivity arising from distance/disengagement, and the dangers of falling back into the traps of essentialism discussed above.

More than just producing a “double bind,” the idea of “native ethnography” is underpinned by methodological nationalism—the idea that nation-states are containers of cultures to which a belonging automatically makes us a “native” can only survive while fetishizing the nation-state. Put most simply, even if I was doing research with agricultural producers in the villages around my home town, I would still not be a “native”—the worlds

¹³⁷ The idea of “native anthropology” was one of the products of the “crisis of representation.” By “repatriating” anthropology and studying and denaturalising “home,” instead of the Other, anthropology was meant to avoid practices that exoticise its subjects.

¹³⁸ See, for example Greverus and Römhild, ‘The Politics of Anthropology at Home’; Kürti and Skalník, *Postsocialist Europe*; Narayan, ‘How Native Is a “Native” Anthropologist?’

¹³⁹ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Discipline and Practice’, 17.

they inhabit and build are different despite their proximity, and an ethnographic stance enables us to both recognise and learn from these differences.¹⁴⁰ Perhaps the only cases where one is really “at home” in their fieldwork are auto-ethnographic works that centre on the researcher,¹⁴¹ and those that investigate the networks and locations the researcher usually moves in.¹⁴² This thesis is not auto-ethnographic—agriculture is not my home, and even the non-formal youth education was somehow foreign to me because, to the genuine surprise of many of my interlocutors, I managed to not engage with it until I decided to study it. Despite this, an ethnographic stance requires me to situate myself. Not only by offering a mandatory list of personal traits that mark most methodologies—female, white, under 30—but by considering how situatedness shapes our questions and ways of answering them. And my own ambiguous position in Serbia undeniably shaped the questions I ask and how I went about finding answers.

a. The researcher in the literature, the field, and the text

The ideas of feminist standpoint epistemology have been eloquently elaborated in a 2015 article by Cecilie Basberg Neumann and Iver Neumann. In the article, they advocate situating oneself in literature, the field, and writing.¹⁴³ Starting with autobiographical situatedness, they draw on feminist standpoint epistemologies and the work of Sandra Harding to argue for strong objectivity—a concept that invites us to learn from the difference between the subject and the object of study, rather than to seek to transcend or control it.¹⁴⁴ In practical terms, this means interrogating the role our own autobiographies played in choosing the research questions and themes we are interested in—situating ourselves *within* the literatures we use.¹⁴⁵ The Introduction and Chapter 1 already emphasised that the choice of fields and themes in this project developed in conversation with works on intervention in general, and on intervention in the Balkans in particular. And while my choice of a region to study was pragmatic to a certain extent—the time/funding constraints made it almost impossible to achieve language and cultural fluency needed for an ethnographic approach in

¹⁴⁰ A good example of this relates to the language that we use in the field. Lie, for example, worked in the World Bank in an English-speaking environment, but still had to learn another language—the “developmental idiolect.” Lie, ‘Challenging Anthropology’, 215. Similarly, I had to learn specific subsets that related to agricultural issues, EU-speak, and non-formal education, even though BCS is my native language.

¹⁴¹ Inayatullah, *Autobiographical International Relations*; Dauphinée, *The Politics of Exile*.

¹⁴² Ethnographic works written by experts on development and interventions in general are here particularly worth mentioning. Mosse, *Cultivating Development*; Mosse, *Adventures in Aidland*.

¹⁴³ Basberg Neumann and Neumann, ‘Uses of the Self’.

¹⁴⁴ Basberg Neumann and Neumann, 803–4.

¹⁴⁵ Basberg Neumann and Neumann, 803–4.

a location where I am unfamiliar with the language—it is also undeniable that the questions I ask are posed from the location of an autobiography largely situated in the region that is the object of the study.

This positionality of my questions is best illustrated in my readings of other works. For example, in Stefanie Kappler's important work on Bosnia in which she provides a much needed focus on local agency, I had to wonder why she considers OKC Abrašević—a famous youth centre in BiH—a “peacebuilding agent” when it looks like “just another” alternative youth space?¹⁴⁶ When looking at photos, I connected it to similar places around the Balkans where my own friends spend time. Moreover, I knew that people who are active in these spaces participate in networks that spread all over Europe and beyond. Of course, it is unique in context and practice, but it is also a part of an international alternative scene. Coming back to the above discussion of what constituted the “proper object” of ethnographic inquiry and how we need to represent our objects of study to give legitimacy to our research, here I needed to ask what makes one a *peacebuilder*? It seems to me that politically active youth in Germany or in the UK would be just that—politically active youth, while the same activities in BiH are cast as *peacebuilding*.

One possible interpretation is disciplinary survival—like anthropology needed “natives” to survive, Peace and Conflict studies need (local) peacebuilders to survive. Letting go of specific concepts endangers the disciplinary self-understanding. However, I also had to ask what remains out of sight when seeing this space as “only” a peacebuilding space—what kind of limits to political subjectivity does it pose? How does it limit what we see? These questions indelibly shaped my research interests. Even though Part II of the thesis continues using the language of intervention and focuses on its “targets,” the below methods and the following chapters seek to engage with subjectivities beyond these conceptual categories—an effort whose transgressions underpin the main argument of the thesis. And while such a project partially reflects an ethnographic sensibility that recognizes the limitation of *concepts*,¹⁴⁷ it also partly springs from a personal discomfort of my own identity being contained in them.

The second aspect of Basberg Neumann and Neumann's recipe is field situatedness—the idea that “[b]ecoming aware of the self and of what happens with you when you relate to the other(s) in the field may be highly analytically rewarding.”¹⁴⁸ Perhaps the most

¹⁴⁶ Kappler, *Local Agency and Peacebuilding*, 115, 142.

¹⁴⁷ Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*, especially the chapter “Concepts”.

¹⁴⁸ Basberg Neumann and Neumann, ‘Uses of the Self’, 807.

productive way this played out in the field for me is in my own status ambiguity. When arriving to Belgrade after being loaded with the anxiety of “going home” and the double bind described above, I was at the same time shocked and relieved when people asked me how I am finding my way in a *foreign* country. But the ambiguity was not only between the perceptions of my UK/international colleagues, and fieldwork participants, but it could also oscillate within one conversation. It became common that people consider me foreign while comparing Croatia and Serbia—the corruption in Serbia is at a level that I cannot imagine in Croatia, the unemployment is more dire, the state is more authoritarian, the poverty is more acute. However, once the conversations started involving Western Europe or the US, I soon became local enough to understand things that these Western Europeans simply could not—they come here expecting that the same frameworks work in Serbia and the Netherlands, they cannot understand how *we* function *here*! Throughout the chapters, I will return to these questions of belonging and hierarchies as constitutive parts of interventions themselves, but for now, I want to emphasise not only the ambiguity of my own location, but also the relational character of all locations *and* their productive effect on our research.

The last site for situatedness is the text itself.¹⁴⁹ Basberg Neumann and Neumann offer two ways of going about this: one is the reflexive wager which produces a text that is centred on how the researcher herself is changed during the research process. Dauphinée’s *Politics of Exile* is probably the most famous example.¹⁵⁰ The second option is the analyticist’s way—in this option, we do not focus on ourselves to interrogate the structures that make us and the world, we do not rely on introspection. Instead, an analyticist “focusses on coming to terms with themselves as an instrument of data production.”¹⁵¹ The difference is also described as one between a *methodological* situatedness that is dealt with analytically, and a *methodic* situatedness that is dealt with reflexively: “Where a reflexivist researcher tends to handle the relation between the interlocutor and researcher by asking how interlocutors affect them, an analyticist researcher tends to ask how the researcher affects the interlocutors.”¹⁵²

Following this distinction, this thesis falls into the analytical camp—I think of “method as a question of producing data by bringing certain value commitment with [us]

¹⁴⁹ For a great overview of how anthropologists have handled “writing themselves in,” see Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field*.

¹⁵⁰ Dauphinée, *The Politics of Exile*.

¹⁵¹ Basberg Neumann and Neumann, ‘Uses of the Self’, 815.

¹⁵² Basberg Neumann and Neumann, 817.

into the field.”¹⁵³ While I accept that it is not only my sense of self that influences the research, but the research process also influenced my sense of self, I do not make space for this in a thesis that is ultimately not concerned with *me*. However, I also do not aim to erase myself from the text: it was *me* who read theories, spoke to people, thought about questions, and analysed observations. I make this visible in the text not to limit its scope, but to practice the ethnographic stance that emphasises that all knowledge is produced from a specific *location* — it means to practice “strong reflexivity” by putting subjects and objects of research on the same “critical, causal claim.”¹⁵⁴ In doing so, I do not shy away from making knowledge claims, but make them with a claim to *strong objectivity*.¹⁵⁵

III Moving forward

The critiques of governmentality resonate with tensions between *ethnographic detail* and explorations of *the forces that make it* in anthropology. In a nutshell, governmentality studies can often become blinded by their object of study: in an effort to emphasise how power works to create subjects, they easily slip into providing a too coherent picture of subject formation which negates any local context that might complicate international designs. While staying attentive to all the critiques voiced in the last decades and presented shortly in this chapter, the rest of the chapter and the thesis will proceed quite differently. Instead of trying to reach a conclusive answer as to what Foucault meant by governmentality, or what is the correct way to “scale it up,” I provide a methodological orientation towards ethnographic explorations of governmentality which do not *resolve* these issues *per se*, but offer ways of thinking and doing *around* these issues.

i. Programs, practices, and effects

In developing a methodological orientation that would be more faithful to subjects of power, rather than Foucault, I turn to Tania Li’s use of the concept of governmentality. Working with governmentality, and combining it with Marxist and Gramscian insights, Li

¹⁵³ Basberg Neumann and Neumann, 818–19.

¹⁵⁴ Harding, ‘Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology’, 458.

¹⁵⁵ Harding, ‘Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology’. An important point to note here is that I am in no way arguing for a hierarchy between “native” and otherwise knowledge — the idea that everyone needs to only study their “home” is not only impossible but would also remove the majority of excellent works in general, and on the Balkans in particular. But what I am arguing for here is that whatever our *location* might be, we should ask ourselves why we ask the questions that we do, and how the tensions that inevitably arise from messy entanglements between us and our objects of study influence our research — not to lead us to paralysis, but to probe ever more.

created a work that skilfully navigated between accounting for projects that apply power and try to shape people's behaviour, and emphasising the incompleteness of such projects and the ways that people take action in response and beyond them. Li outlines three key concepts, programs, practices, and effects, which should guide empirical analysis of government.¹⁵⁶

Programs are “goal[s] to be accomplished, together with the rationale[s] that make[s] [them] thinkable, and the associated strategies and techniques.”¹⁵⁷ They depend on rendering certain problems technical, bounding a specific population to the problem, and devising a mechanism for addressing the problem and evaluating the process. Most work on interventions using governmentality has focused precisely on this aspect that is legible from policy documents and discourse. It is in these processes that expert knowledge is activated to produce orientalist discourses. A more ethnographic approach, which is emerging in the practice and ethnographic turns in IR as well, “pay[s] attention to how programs take hold and change things, while keeping in view their instabilities, fragilities and fractures, and the ways in which failure prepares the ground for new programming.”¹⁵⁸

Practices refer to two sets of actions: those which constitute the area of intervention by rendering it technical, and informal practices which transform, adapt, reject, and resist these processes. This implies exploring the gap between a plan and its realisation and involves asking questions like what are those connected to a project, as proponents, implementers or targets, actually doing and how are their practices interpreted by other subjects.¹⁵⁹ While the practice turn in IR¹⁶⁰ has brought these dynamics to the fore when investigating how high politics are produced, reproduced, contested and reformed in the everyday lives of politicians, it is still not common to ask how these interact with local everyday subjectivities and experiences.

And finally, *effects* of governmental intervention can be both intended and unintended. They surpass the different programmes' “limited, technical field[s] of intervention.” Li emphasises that of special importance is “the intersection between particular programs with their limited, technical field of intervention, and the many other

¹⁵⁶ For her work employing these concepts in a rich ethnographic study, see Li, *The Will to Improve*.

¹⁵⁷ Li, ‘Governmentality’, 279.

¹⁵⁸ Li, 279.

¹⁵⁹ Li, 280.

¹⁶⁰ Neumann, ‘Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn’; Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, ‘Power in Practice’; Adler and Pouliot, ‘International Practices’, March 2011.

processes that exceed their scope.”¹⁶¹ The emphasis on these messy intersections has far-reaching consequences on how we are to methodologically approach *effects* as they are recounted by local targets of interventions. The *effects* of the intervention are not confined to the intended policy areas but become intertwined with the social processes they encounter on ground.

While the concepts of programs, practice, and effects helped me sharpen my view during fieldwork, they do not provide much reflection on how we might pursue them. Most importantly, they do not explicitly warn against dangerous conceptualisations of the local that we have encountered in Chapter 1. The following section summarizes the points made in this chapter to offer some direction on how to study programs, practices, and effects of international interventions.

ii. Positional critique

This project practices a positional, rather than a cultural, critique. Sabaratnam differentiates between the two to highlight that positional critique abandons the problematic analytical use of “culture,” allows a more complete, appreciation of international politics, and remains open to complex “political content and context of human consciousness, meaning, and agency.”¹⁶² This has very clear consequences. First, such orientation moves away from deciding *who or what is the local* in any scenario. Instead, I abandon this “nostalgia for origins” and agree that by *local* we mean the specific political and epistemological conditions that govern the production of locality, as opposed to any essentialist notion of culture.¹⁶³ With the relevance of the idea of the local as both providing the tools to enhance international intervention efforts, and the source of critiques against it, this letting go might force scholars in a productive crisis resembling the project of decentring the field (as the container of the local) in anthropology.¹⁶⁴

Along these lines, I propose to follow Ferguson and Gupta and move beyond “a commitment to ‘the local,’” to foregrounding “epistemological and political issues of location” instead¹⁶⁵—namely how we conceptualise subjects and objects of our research process. During fieldwork, I did not look just for Serbian people as locals, but I focussed on speaking to those who I thought were the targets of interventions, and those who seemed to be

¹⁶¹ Li, ‘Governmentality’, 280.

¹⁶² Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism’, 273.

¹⁶³ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Culture, Power, Place’, 7.

¹⁶⁴ This project is already underway in IR, see Richmond, Kappler, and Björkdahl, ‘The “Field” in the Age of Intervention’.

¹⁶⁵ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Discipline and Practice’, 39.

translating between the intervention and its implementation on the ground. By refusing to take the concepts of local and the international for granted, I strive to more fully appreciate the work that goes into ascribing those labels to specific people, ideas, practices, and processes.

Secondly, a positional critique looks for *effects*, rather than trying to define or explain *success* or *failure*.¹⁶⁶ In relation to governmentality, a positional critique would move us beyond a focus on the dichotomy of success/failure in projects of government that leads to research *looking for* governmentality or *searching for* the *homo oeconomicus* as *proof* of governmentalisation. This kind of approach not only reduces governmentality to hypothesis testing, but it also further limits our object of study to *success*, and more often *failures*, of *international interventions*.

Many IR accounts of interventions start with this observation of failure and seek to answer *why* this failure happened. Internal and fundamental critiques will find different reasons for the failure, but their objects of study are the same. I propose to look for effects that go beyond what we might consider simple success or failures. In practical terms, this calls for more open-ended interviews that I will discuss shortly, but it also changes the way that I use governmentality as a concept. In this effort, governmentality stops being something to confirm or negate, but becomes a tool that brings to fore both the ideological importance and material effect of positing a certain kind of life as the norm.

This view is present in the vast literature on critiques of governmentality. Lemke, for example argues that liberalism *is trying* to create a reality which it argues *already exists*.¹⁶⁷ Taking this seriously means not looking for this reality—buying into the argument that it already exists—but focusing on the myriad of ways in which it is trying and failing to be realised. Vraști built on this when she argued that governmentality is never global, but is always universal. This is worth quoting at length:

“Global governmentality manifests its force not through the actual number of people or states it controls, but by acting as a *standard of reference* against which all forms of life (individual, communal, political) can be assessed according to modern conceptions of civilisation and order. Those individuals who possess the skill, talent, market value, and entrepreneurial spirit to respond opportunistically to the demands of capital will enjoy greater access to job markets, housing options, residence permits, and cultural goods around the world. Similarly, those states that can abide by to the dictums of good governance, fiscal responsibility, and foreign security will receive

¹⁶⁶ See Li, ‘Beyond “The State” and Failed Schemes’, for a similar argument.

¹⁶⁷ Lemke, “‘The Birth of Bio-Politics’”, 203.

better credit ratings, lending agreements, and international support. Those who fail to conform will become second-order citizens, confined to slums and ghettos, doomed to perform low-skilled and tedious jobs, or perpetually developing states stuck in a tight spot between foreign intervention and humanitarian assistance.”¹⁶⁸

It is precisely this *standard of reference* that can be tracked through programs and practices of government. And the effects of applying this standard cannot be confined in the diagnosis of success or failure.

Moreover, similarly to the treatment of liberalism as a reality to be discovered, accounts of subjectivity in governmentality studies often approach *homo oeconomicus* as type of subject to “look for” during fieldwork. In a way, this represents the *homo oeconomicus* as an anthropological fact that we need to confirm or dismiss.¹⁶⁹ Yahya Madra and Ceren Özselçuk argue that Foucault never saw the *homo oeconomicus* as a finished project but instead treats it “as an *interface* between the individual and the government.”¹⁷⁰ An *interface* that translates human life into data comparable to governmental standards of reference. Thus, the following chapters move away from a *success/failure* view of subjectivation and treat the ideal of a neoliberal subject as an interface through which humans become *known* to projects of government. In this effort, governmentality becomes the critical position through which to examine the interaction of subjectivity and government.

iii. Doing fieldwork: talking, observing, and thinking

“[...] as a framework, method *itself* is taken to be at least provisionally secure. The implication is that method hopes to act as a set of short-circuits that link us in the best possible way with reality, and allow us to return more or less quickly from that reality to our place of study with findings that are reasonably secure, at least for the time being. But this, most of all, is what we need to unlearn. Method, in the reincarnation that I am proposing, will often be slow and uncertain. A risky and troubling process, it will take time and effort to make realities and hold them steady for a moment against a background of flux and indeterminacy.”¹⁷¹

While the previous section challenged the idea of the local as temporally and culturally bounded outside of intervention, and emphasised the importance of not treating it ontologically different, it is incredibly difficult to translate these insights into practical

¹⁶⁸ Vrsti, ‘Universal but Not Truly “Global”’, 64.

¹⁶⁹ Madra and Özselçuk, ‘Jouissance and Antagonism in the Forms of the Commune’, 487.

¹⁷⁰ Madra and Özselçuk, 485; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 252–53.

¹⁷¹ Law, *After Method*, 10. Emphasis original.

methods of doing research. A fairly straightforward recipe comes, perhaps surprisingly, from IR, as opposed to anthropology. In her project of decolonising intervention scholarship, Sabaratnam proposes to do so through “reconstructing subjecthood:” “the property of having one’s presence, consciousness and realities engaged in the analysis of the political space.”¹⁷² Moreover, she offers specific strategies for doing so. These strategies directly deal with temporal and cultural confinement of the local experiences, and tackle the ontological difference often implied in that confinement. The three strategies refer to recovering historical presence, engaging political consciousness, and investigating material realities.¹⁷³

Recovering historical presence counters the ahistorical orientation of intervention scholarship. This ahistorical orientation prevents us from seeing the long-term connections between the locations we are researching and liberalism and/or modernity.¹⁷⁴ This in turn leads to seeing all those who *do* engage with liberal and/or international institutions, norms, and ideas, as “either co-opted into its ideology via false consciousness, or engaged in elaborate game playing.” Recovering historical presence then directly confronts the temporal confinement of local subject by “cultivating an appreciation of the historical presence of target societies and contemplating its significance for the politics of intervention.”¹⁷⁵

Cultural confinement should be tackled through her strategy of engaging political consciousness—beyond approaching local politics within the labels of *local* or *everyday*. Sabaratnam distils two goals of anti-colonial thinkers that are relevant here. Firstly, this engagement implies *recognition* as a political and decolonial act of humanisation. Secondly, this engagement adds analytical strength to an account of a regime (whether it is colonialism or intervention) through the eyes of those living it.¹⁷⁶ Most importantly for this project, this view complicates “essentialised” conceptions of political subjects—such as the coloniser/native, or indeed the intervener and the intervened upon.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, it emphasises that this project of engaging local subjectivities is not just about adding empirical detail, but that things we uncover help us learn about the intervention itself.

Lastly, the focus on ontological difference and trying to figure out what is truly local should be replaced with attention to “material realities of the interventions.” This new view

¹⁷² Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*, 39.

¹⁷³ Sabaratnam, chap. 3.

¹⁷⁴ Sabaratnam, 40.

¹⁷⁵ Sabaratnam, 41.

¹⁷⁶ Here, Sabaratnam also draws from (and defends) feminist standpoint epistemology. Sabaratnam, 47–54.

¹⁷⁷ Sabaratnam, ‘Re-Thinking the Liberal Peace’, 43–44.

invites us to go beyond critiquing “neoliberalism,” or governmentality and intervention for that matter, as ideologies or abstract rationalities, and instead see them as “concrete system[s] lived by humans in time and space.”¹⁷⁸ I do this by moving away from governmentality as just an abstract form of government, through exploring how its programs, practices, and effects are experienced by my interlocutors.

These strategies are both powerfully argued for and used in Sabaratnam’s book. However, the book understates the inevitable messiness that this kind of research brings with it. Reading Sabaratnam’s book (and even more so the thesis that the book is based on), one gets the feeling that she proposes a methodological *recipe* that was developed through an in-depth engagement with anti-colonial thinkers and then practiced in Mozambique in quite a straight-forward way. It is this methodological straightforwardness that I want to complicate, because following a clear *recipe* might preclude the disruptions that will be the foundation of the discussion in Part III of the thesis.

If we are to allow the experiences of interlocutors to guide our research, we have to be open to changing our research as we learn more about these experiences. As such, while we might have strong orientations and philosophical underpinnings to our methodologies, the idea that we will practice them undisturbed and that our questions will remain the same is dangerously misleading because it allows the researcher to avoid the biggest benefit of an ethnographic approach to fieldwork — being faced with the limitations of our own concepts and questions. It is helpful to adopt an abductive approach to reasoning in which we allow our thinking to be led from surprise in the field (these surprises are usually born out of the mismatch between the expectations researchers bring into the field and their observations and experiences once they arrive there) towards its possible explanations.¹⁷⁹ Such process will not necessarily flow in a linear way, but will require a recursive constant movement between theory and the field.¹⁸⁰ The added value of ethnography here is the possibility to let fieldwork encounters actually change our questions and account for the positionality of those questions.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*, 45.

¹⁷⁹ Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design*, 28.

¹⁸⁰ For an account of such a research process, see Zirakzadeh, ‘When Nationalists Are Not Separatists’; Cerwonka and Malkki, *Improvising Theory*.

¹⁸¹ Jansen, Brković, and Čelebičić, ‘Introduction: New Ethnographic Perspectives on Mature Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina’, 21–22.

Here, I will present my tactics of inquiry, how they changed during fieldwork, and how they influenced what I was looking for. As the quote opening this section shows, methodologies are necessarily prescriptive—they have to argue for a specific way of going about finding an answer and they are offered not only as lessons *learned*, but as lessons to be *repeated*. Following a prescription gives us a sense of security — “if only you do your methods properly you will lead a healthy research life.”¹⁸² Contrary to this, the one aspect I want to emphasise is the uncertainty, incompleteness, messiness, or fuzziness that accompanies this process. I do this not just to provide a more honest account of my own methodology, but to emphasise that the tensions between our empirical and our analytical practices are both inevitable and productive—especially if we strive to learn *from*, not just *about*, the people, things, and processes we encounter in fieldwork.

Gideon Kunda describes ethnographic fieldwork in the following quote:

“Ethnographic research, in practice, consists of four very basic activities, regardless of the fancy names attached to them by methodologists seeking legitimacy in various popular genres of academic rhetoric: observing people’s activities, talking with people willing to answer questions about their life, collecting texts of various sorts produced, preserved, displayed and consumed by the people one is studying, and devising ways of keeping a comprehensive, detailed and reasonably legible record of all of this.”¹⁸³

These four tactics: observing people, talking to people around very broad themes, collecting texts, and archiving records of all of this is basically what I have done during 2016. In addition, I reviewed and learned from other ethnographies, and I paid more attention to things that are usually missing from governmentality studies: namely political economy, debates around legislation, and contestation—things that can help us create an image of context. These tactics together make my method.

a. Participant observation and observing participation

The tactics I used varied both between the two fields, and within them. They changed based on issues of access—what I could approach and when, and in relation to the questions that I was asking as my research was developing. In non-formal youth education, it was much easier to participate in the traditional fieldwork sense—I attended a course over a whole semester and got to know the facilitators and the participants. I participated in three “live-in” events, and I attended a multitude of lectures in Belgrade and in Novi Sad where

¹⁸² Law, *After Method*, 9.

¹⁸³ Kunda, ‘Reflections on Becoming an Ethnographer’, 14.

nothing differentiated me from other participants. One great benefit of participating in various educational events is that they were participatory, but they nevertheless exposed me to a large number of people, life stories, and experiences. In many ways, these gatherings often served as focus groups—as we would be discussing political events, concepts, and observations, I was there to record the conversation. Even though it was not me who organised it specifically as a “focus group”, I nevertheless got exposed to a focus group dynamic. Without the pressure of the usual formal invitation and expectations associated with focus groups, these meetings were probably more data rich than the usual focus groups.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, by getting to know people better, I was able to conduct interviews as a part of participant observation.¹⁸⁵

In the field of agriculture, on the other hand, my “participation” was more limited. I was unsure whether I should try to spend time on a specific farm or seek access among the policy makers. With policy makers, I tried to attend the trainings that the employees of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy received, but my queries were promptly silenced with reports on the trainings, rather than an invitation to attend them. In interviews, I was often presented with well-rehearsed technocratic explanations and scripts. While providing an important insight into dominant narratives that guide policies in Serbian agriculture, these interviews provided little in terms of personal experiences that I was interested in. Aside from limitations of access to policy makers who translate between the EU and local producers, I also considered spending time with a specific group of producers. This, however, seemed unsuitable for the myriad of processes that I was interested in—staying within one family, I would not have the access to different stories like I did when I attended educational events.

As the following section will show, I compensated for this by conducting more ethnographic interviews. But I also attended press conferences and public events and followed mainstream and social media that relates to agriculture in Serbia. I also travelled to Romania as a part of the Serbian delegation to the Nyéléni European Food Sovereignty Forum. This not only allowed me to travel and spend time with people who see themselves as actors in Serbian agriculture, but it also opened up new networks that I explored. With

¹⁸⁴ In these workshops, I asked for the group’s consent at the beginning of the session as advised by the Aberystwyth University Ethics Officer. I presented my research and answered any questions that were raised. Interestingly, when working in groups, people were more likely to ask for more details: my funding, my publication plans, my themes and questions, and even about my plans for returning to the region after the PhD.

¹⁸⁵ The distinction as a part of participant observation and the interview apart from participant observation, comes from Skinner, ‘A Four-Part Introduction to the Interview’, 35.

time, I felt I became at least a bit of a part of community of people broadly interested in agriculture in Serbia. I received invites to events and developed close relationships that “kept me in the loop.” All these things gave me a glimpse into the way that people relate to themselves and others even without traditional participant observation.

b. Ethnographic and narrative interviews

To compensate, I conducted more interviews—using a snowball technique and always keeping an ethnographic sensibility when conducting them. In my first methods training on ethnography, we were explicitly told that an interview-based study *is not* an ethnography. And while I used more tactics than interviews, it is still true that my study of Serbian agriculture is based more on *listening*, than on observing or participating. Here I did not use interviews to just *complement* participant observation, but I consider the interview ethnographic *in itself*.¹⁸⁶ Martin Forsey summarises well what I mean by ethnographic interviews:

“To conduct interviews with an ethnographic imaginary is to ask questions beyond the immediate concerns of the research question. They probe biography, seeking to locate the cultural influences on a person’s life, looking later to link this to the pursued question, or, in the inductive spirit of ethnography, to even change the question.”¹⁸⁷

The ethnographic orientation was not only a choice, but also a necessity. Since I was interested in subjectivity—a concept of analysis that does not have a correlate concept of practice—I could not go in and ask about how “governmentalized” my interlocutors felt. I was interested in effects of intervention programs, but because I was interested in the *unintended* aspects of them, it was not enough to just directly ask about how the people I spoke to see the EU (although I have often touched upon this as well). Here, open-ended and semi- and un-structured interviews became a key tactic. They allowed me to learn about what my interlocutors found important, and permitted me to get a glimpse of the ways they relate to themselves in discussion on how best to develop towards peace, democracy, and prosperity.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Forsey and Hockey, ‘Ethnography Is Not Participant Observation’.

¹⁸⁷ Forsey, ‘Ethnography as Participant Listening’, 568.

¹⁸⁸ For similar approaches, see Johnson, ‘Listening to Migrant Stories’; Aberbach and Rockman, ‘Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews’.

d. Reading policy documents as ethnographic artefacts

The main contribution of an ethnographic approach to governmentality studies is going beyond the usual textual bias that governmentality studies operate with. This is mostly because it seems obvious that policy documents are not faithful images of policy— Li's engagement with policy texts, for example, was even criticised by policy makers themselves because texts are “poor representations of program realities.”¹⁸⁹ This obsolescence of text was visually overwhelming when I started arriving to numerous NGO offices. They all had libraries that consisted of NGO publications—policy recommendations, summaries, analyses, newsletters, and full-length books—that were stored in their offices, and then given in kilos to curious researchers like me. I started accumulating this literature and with the size of the pile, my anxiety grew as well—when was I to read all these texts? And more importantly, what was I supposed to gain from reading them?

In her defence of her use of policy texts, Li emphasises two dimensions of texts. First, they have effects because they actually inspire practices. And second, these texts also “reveal an ethos, a way of defining problems and connecting them to solutions.”¹⁹⁰ I find both of these assumptions questionable. In the former case, the causation between text and practice is impossible to discern. As we discussed in Chapter 1, they are intertwined in ways that prevent any “origin” stories. How are we to know whether the text *inspired* policy, or it was created in conjunction to *legitimise* an already set solution? Are the two united by a particular rationality in both cases? In regard to the latter case of reading the documents in hopes of discovering an “ethos,” I was faced with two issues. First of all, the neoliberal ethos in policies today is so pervasive that it does not tell us much about the specificity of the experiences that we want to study. Any policy recommendation nowadays relies on governmental ideals of market competition, efficiency, transparency, and individual accountability. I was not interested in once again “discovering” neoliberalism. The second issue relates to the circumstances in which these documents are written. Is the neoliberal ethos in them a reflection of the authors' life worlds, or is it meant to tick the donor boxes and secure funding? I find this question unanswerable, but I also find governmentality to be uniquely positioned to explore this ambiguity through its rejection of a clear distinction between co-optation and resistance.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Li, ‘Revisiting “The Will to Improve”’, 235.

¹⁹⁰ Li, 235.

¹⁹¹ Mitchell, ‘Everyday Metaphors of Power’. More on this in Chapter 4.

Keeping these issues in mind, I read policy documents and NGO publications as ethnographic artefacts—I learned about how and by whom they were created, how they were justified, and what purpose their authors intended for them. At times, it was the *ethos* in them that I analysed, while at other times it was the discrepancy between the ethos and the material reality that provided insight.

e. Archiving

The archiving of material was a learning process. Drawing on Emerson et al.,¹⁹² I kept notes on my phone and in a notebook, and I kept a fieldwork journal in the *DayOne* application on my laptop. Most of the interviews were recorded and were provided with written consent. However, once I started researching land policy, people were more reluctant to leave any paper trail, so I used the oral consent procedure and relied on writing extensive interview notes.¹⁹³

Archiving in my case also involved translation. I selected the locality of my study partially based on my own language skills, so I naturally acted as not only translating between my interlocutors and this text, but also as a translator from Serbian to English and vice versa. Without embarking into the field of translation studies, it is obvious that this adds another layer of representation to the text. All BCS (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian) translations are mine, unless stated otherwise. If I found some particular phrases important and not easily translated from BCS to English, I have added the original in BCS in Latin script in the parenthesis.¹⁹⁴ I have also chosen to emphasise words and phrases that are used in English. Many words are introduced from English, and I find this an important aspect of the culture. Many of the English phrases and words are hybridized by attaching BCS grammatical suffixes. When possible, I have chosen to keep those forms as they are telling in how language reflects the domestication of different concepts.

f. Consuming other ethnographies

One aspect that is missing from Kunda's four simple tactics is engaging with other ethnographies written around the theme and area of our research. This might be considered

¹⁹² Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*.

¹⁹³ I followed the oral consent guidelines from The Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) at University of Oxford with the approval of Aberystwyth University Ethics Officer. All names are anonymised according to the usual ethnographic practice.

¹⁹⁴ I have chosen to use Latin script rather than Cyrillic because both are recognised as national scripts in Serbia, while Latin is accessible to a wider international audience.

a simple literature review in anthropology, but it requires stating more explicitly in IR. This is what Millar talks about as Pillar 2 in his framework which relates to “ethnographic preparation”—engaging with anthropological literature on the topics we are interested in to help us understand how people experiencing peacebuilding operations make meaning.¹⁹⁵ In my case, this was even more important for multiple reasons. First of all, the everyday people I was interested in are missing from both IR and Political Science, so ethnographies provided a space where I could find the subjects I wanted to learn about and from. Furthermore, I was also lucky that specific topics I was interested in were ethnographically investigated before. This made me turn to anthropologists who are cited throughout the following chapters. Finally, reading ethnographies allowed me to more fully appreciate the historical presence of my interlocutors before, during, and after the post-war intervention.

g. Context

Another additional tactic was contextualising my observations within structural conditions in Serbia. Once again, I entered the field explicitly attentive to this issue because governmentality studies are often accused of ignoring structural conditions, but my observations also guided me to them. For example, with so much time in workshops spent talking about job applications, I had to consider the incredible youth unemployment rates that my interlocutors were faced with, and the various explanations of it offered by different people and institutions. In agriculture, I did not look at only indicators for Serbian agriculture, but I also familiarised myself with the effects of EU membership in new member states like Croatia, Romania, and Bulgaria. This helped me see the experiences of my interlocutors in a broader context, and also allowed me to talk with them on more stable ground—in many cases, the people I spoke to *expected* me to know things that they do not, and thus keeping myself informed about these issues seemingly removed from ethnographic methods in interviewing, listening, and observing became another key strategy.

Conclusions

Chapter 1 showed that even critical scholarship on interventions struggles with *locating* political agency with the targets of interventions, and *connecting* that agency to international power beyond representations that see the connection as unilinear and finished. This Chapter devised my own approach—an ethnographic exploration of governmentality—

¹⁹⁵ Millar, *An Ethnographic Approach to Peacebuilding*, 69, 73.

in conversation with works in anthropology that seek to similarly locate human subjectivity between “the dangers of naïve essentialism” and a “mechanical understanding of processes of subject constitution.”¹⁹⁶

Since the 1980s, anthropology has been dealing with many issues that intervention scholarship in IR is tackling today: what are the dangers of culturalist critiques, how are we to approach subjects and account for both *international power* that shapes them, and their own *agency* outside of it? The two bodies of literature examined in this chapter not only share the same problem, but they also arrive at it from opposite directions: anthropology emerged from its obsession with “the native” and started questioning how it might still study ethnographic detail without fetishizing it as completely separate from the world. On the other hand, IR seeks to move beyond its preoccupation with international power and questions how to continue studying (and critiquing) international and global power while becoming more attentive to local agencies. Following both works in IR which critically approach the ways that intervention literature has engaged with local subjects, and works in anthropology that have problematised ideas of the local and the field, the thesis proceeds through a positional critique of programs, effects, and practices of government.

This contextualisation serves multiple purposes: on the one hand, it tackles the *politics*—hierarchies, contestation, and negotiation, that might be occluded by the exclusive focus on the *governmental* in governmentality studies.¹⁹⁷ In order to address these politics, we have to acknowledge the hierarchies that constitute the relations between the intervener and the intervened upon. In doing this, we are creating space for considerations of structural contexts of interventions. As I will discuss more in Chapter 6, ethnography here does not imply *just* “thick description” nor does it subscribe to a “flat ontology.” It argues for a reflexive approach to these issues through *experience*.

The thesis explores how subjects themselves relate to forms of power and thus treats governmentality as an encounter, rather than a one-directional shaping. This opens the doors to more fully considering the agencies we are interested in. And it is precisely these two aspects—structures and agencies, that international governmentality studies are accused of erasing. This understanding of ethnography goes beyond “thick description.”¹⁹⁸ In Part II of

¹⁹⁶ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Culture, Power, Place’, n. 17.

¹⁹⁷ Walters, *Governmentality*, 5.

¹⁹⁸ Povinelli refers to “austere ethnography” or a “sociography” as the “other” kind of ethnography. While my work is significantly different than Povinelli’s, I think it can also come close to these terms. Povinelli, *Economics of Abandonment*, x.

the thesis that presents my empirical practice, ethnography is employed not just to access empirical reality, but also to start making sense of observations—sometimes by using theory, sometimes by invoking structures,¹⁹⁹ and sometimes by relating to the work of other ethnographers. It is the ethnographic stance that unites these varying tactics.

In conclusion, this project is concerned with avoiding the traps of both mistaking local subjectivity for caricatured cultural relativism, and of mechanically understanding subjectivation. The following two chapters will practice this in two fields: non-formal youth education explored in Chapter 4, and agricultural governance in Chapter 5. However, because I sought to *learn* from these experiences, rather than just describe them, Chapter 6 will use the tensions, lessons, and discoveries of Chapters 4 and 5 to draw out lessons on how we might better make sense of the experiences of those living the consequences international intervention.

¹⁹⁹ In doing so, this project remains aware of the rich work that has been done on the issue of agencies and structure in IR. Instead of pursuing these arguments in terms of social theory, I proceed to show how ethnography can capture these theoretical tensions within its empirical practice. I hope to demonstrate that an ethnographic stance can help think structure and agency together.

Part II

Chapter 3

Situating Serbia

This short chapter will introduce the setting for the empirical practice presented in Part II of the thesis. It provides a short overview of Serbian history, it pays special attention to the 1990s when Serbia was centre-stage in international politics, and it presents the contemporary socio-political landscape in which I conducted fieldwork in 2016.

I Historical overview

Serbia has been in many different state formations—it was part of the Byzantine, Ottoman, and Habsburg empires and has had many names, orders, and rulers. It functioned as a kingdom from the 12th to the 14th century until it was conquered by the Ottoman Empire. While the South was ruled by the Ottomans, the northern parts of contemporary Serbia, now known as the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, were ruled by the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. This division is popularly invoked to explain the regional *differences* between the much better-off Vojvodina, and the poor south of Serbia. However, it also explains the connection between Serbian national consciousness and the Orthodox Christian Church which united the two parts and thus served as the basis of Serbian national identity.¹ Serbia was ruled by the Ottoman Empire until 1832 when it became an independent principality. In 1882, it was recognised as an independent state, and between 1888 and 1918 it functioned as a constitutional monarchy with many democratic institutions: political parties, parliamentary decision-making, and independent press.²

WWI brought about the fall of Empires which had controlled Serbian territories, and the so called First Yugoslavia was created in 1918 under the official name: Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This was the first union of South Slavic peoples, and it came to be by merging the short-lived State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs (former territory of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire), and the independent Kingdom of Serbia. In 1929, it was renamed to Kingdom of Yugoslavia and it existed as such until the Axis power invasion in April 1941. During WWII, Serbia was partitioned, and most parts of it occupied by different

¹ Vujačić, *Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia*, 123–30.

² Uvalić, *Serbia's Transition*, 1.

Axis powers, while central Serbia was controlled by the Serbian government installed by the German occupation. The Second Yugoslavia was born after WWII under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, who led the partisan resistance against the Axis powers during WWII. Democratic Federal Yugoslavia was proclaimed in 1943, and even though the King recognized it, the monarchy was abolished in 1945 and the country was renamed to The Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia in 1946 when the communist government was established. It first sided with the Eastern Bloc, but after the Tito-Stalin break in 1948, Yugoslavia pursued its own specific vision of communism that differed substantially from the Soviet system in both domestic and foreign policy. In 1963, the country was renamed once again to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY).³

SFRY officially ended in 1992 when Croatia and Slovenia seceded and left the so called Third Yugoslavia—the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) made up from Serbia, Kosovo, and Montenegro.⁴ When approaching the region, it is the wars of this period that mark policy, public, and scholarly imaginations. The war crimes, rapes, genocide, and other atrocities happening among neighbours and families were televised, studied, and discussed broadly. It is impossible to write a concise history of the conflicts—even an introduction to the literature is the size of a book.⁵ In short, the label “the wars of the Yugoslav succession”⁶ actually covers five different conflicts: the conflict between Serbia and Croatia (1990-1995), the short intervention of JNA (Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija—Yugoslav People's Army) in Slovenia in 1991, the wars in BiH that saw Bosniak (Bosnian Muslims), Croatian, and Serbian warring sides (1992-1995), the wars in Kosovo 1998-1999, and the short conflict in Macedonia in 2001. While Serbia was involved in all but the Macedonian one, the only fighting within Serbia happened during the controversial NATO bombings (March 24, 1999 to June 10, 1999) that sought to prevent further war crimes in Kosovo by bombing Serbian territories.⁷

³ In 2002, the relationship between Serbia and Montenegro was changed and this was reflected in abandoning the name FRY and becoming Serbia and Montenegro. In 2006, Montenegro proclaimed independence and left what is today Serbia and its complicated relationship with Kosovo.

⁴ In 2003, the FRY changed the structure of the union into a “state union” under the name of Serbia and Montenegro. Baker, *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s*, 86.

⁵ As demonstrated by the recently published overview Baker, *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s*.

⁶ The name itself is debated. See Ramet, ‘Disputes about the Dissolution of Yugoslavia and Its Wake’.

⁷ For more on this military campaign conducted without the approval of the UN Security Council, see Roberts, ‘NATO’s “Humanitarian War” over Kosovo’.

There are a few important things to note in relation to the 1990s wars and the ways in which they are interpreted. The first thing to mention is the highly politicised discourse around the wars: even choosing one's words demonstrates loyalties and positions. For example, talking about "aggression" and the "Homeland War" is common among those who put the blame on Serbia and emphasise the victimhood of Croatia and Bosnia. The label "civil wars" is used by those who believed in Yugoslav sovereignty and thus saw it as a war *within* a state, while invoking the word "genocide" is still considered a controversial political statement in Serbia.⁸ Secondly, the explanations of the causes of the conflict present a study of its own.⁹ While the majority of explanations focus on ethnicity and nationality as the main factors in the conflict, critical scholars have explored a spate of other factors: the structural weakness of the Yugoslavian state that was engraved in the 1974 constitution that worked towards decentralisation,¹⁰ the economic decline that was reflected in the paradoxical socialist unemployment¹¹ and exacerbated by the 1973 international oil crisis and the subsequent refinancing of debt under the IMF's guidance,¹² and the mismanagement of the crisis by Western European countries and the US.¹³

More than just explaining the conflict, these interpretations also inspired the great peacebuilding efforts launched in the war's aftermath. Taking place in post-Cold War liberal hubris, the peacebuilding projects in BiH and Kosovo set a precedent for an "extensive model" of post-conflict intervention that was later practiced in East Timor, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.¹⁴ Moreover, the field of transitional justice exploded after the set-up of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)—the first international war crimes court after Nuremberg and Tokyo. While Serbia was the country with the highest number of indictments at the ICTY,¹⁵ the reconstruction efforts in the country itself seem relatively small—while Bosnia, Kosovo, and Croatia to some extent saw the launch of great

⁸ Baker starts her review with a similar observation, Baker, *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s*, 2.

⁹ For an overview, see Jović, 'Disintegration of Yugoslavia'; Baker, *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s*.

¹⁰ Baker, *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s*, 22.

¹¹ The phenomenon of socialist unemployment has been famously examined in Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*.

¹² Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*.

¹³ Baker, *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s*, 53.

¹⁴ Baker, 1990s. See also Sörensen, 'Balkanism and the New Radical Interventionism'; Woodward, 'The Long Intervention'. for the relevance of the Yugoslav wars in the emergence of the contemporary intervention regime.

¹⁵ ICTY officially closed on December 21, 2017. Out of 161 persons indicted, 96 were Serbian. 'The Cases | International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia'.

peacebuilding operations, the international community's approach to Serbia in the 1990s was largely punitive until the removal of Milošević in 2000. Even after the restoration of ties to the West, Serbia did not receive concrete international attention like BiH or Kosovo, nor EU membership like Slovenia (2007) and Croatia (2013).¹⁶ As such, it presents a rich site for studying the effects of more dispersed interventions.

Because the war and its aftermath were spectacular, the difference between Yugoslavia as a state socialist country, and the current European aspirations of the successor states, is often exaggerated. Yugoslavia was *not* a Soviet state, it practiced its own forms of state socialism, and it was economically and politically much more open to the outside world. After the break with Stalin in 1948, Yugoslavia's socialism was based on social, rather than state, ownership and an economic democratic ideal of self-management.¹⁷ Yugoslav socialism, reworked by Edvard Kardelj, worked towards "withering away" of the state that opened space for a bigger role of the market that was seen as superior to both Soviet state-socialism and American state-capitalism.¹⁸ More than just a different economic system, the reworking of ideology also led to more independent media, less repression than in other communist countries, and more openness dissent.¹⁹

Besides its internal landscape and contrary to the usual narrative of communist isolation, Yugoslavia was also highly integrated politically and economically with the world. Politically, it navigated the fine line between the US and the USSR with Tito founding the Non-Aligned Movement along with Gamal Abdel Nasser and Jawaharlal Nehru. Economically, it was open to trade and finance, and it served as the first experiment in structural adjustment with the IMF sponsored austerity program beginning as early as 1981.²⁰ So while Milošević's Serbia, its sanctions, and NATO bombings definitely did raise a generation of Serbians in isolation in the 1990s, treating the post-2000 as the first experience of markets or liberalism would be highly misleading.

¹⁶ Uvalić, *Serbia's Transition*, 5.

¹⁷ For more on the Yugoslavian economic order, see Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*; Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*.

¹⁸ Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism*. While the nuances of Bockmann's work and the wider implications of this argument are beyond the scope of the current discussion, even this quick overview demonstrates that the too easy approach to a neoliberal reliance on markets and de-centralized self-regulation should be problematised. Condemning markets as "new" and "imposed" prevents inquiring into how they historically develop.

¹⁹ Uvalić, *Serbia's Transition*, 30.

²⁰ Uvalić, 17.

II Getting rid of Milošević: 1990s and early 2000s

The engagement of the international community in Serbia has been extremely varied. Following the conflicts, Croatia and BiH by 1995 explicitly oriented themselves towards the EU ideals of parliamentary democracy and free market capitalism. Serbia, on the other hand, remained with Slobodan Milošević in power under a quasi-socialist system with highly authoritarian traits. For many Serbians, the 1990s are remembered for record-breaking inflations,²¹ a predatory state that was not only corrupt, but actively sought to extract foreign currency from its citizens, and as an era of increasing unemployment and inequality.²² In 2000, Serbia's GDP was only at 47% of the 1989 GDP—and 1989 was already a year of great crisis in Yugoslavia with the annual inflation rate of 1252%.²³

In the 1990s, Serbia went through multiple rounds of varied political and economic sanctions (from May 1995 to October 1996, and then again in 1998-1999), it lost membership in all major international organisations that was resumed only in the early 2000s, and it was late to sign the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) for the Western Balkans region.²⁴ Despite this isolation, the final removal of Milošević is often attributed precisely to international democracy assistance. It is during this era, the late 1990s, that Serbia's super-star democracy promotion status is born. While Milošević was consolidating his power by eradicating free media and stealing elections, the international community, led by the US, embarked on a vast project of democracy promotion that entailed getting rid of Milošević. The peaceful “revolution” that happened on October 5, 2000, after Milošević refused to acknowledge the results of the presidential election in which Vojislav Koštunica won, had profound consequences beyond Serbia: it served to inspire similar “coloured” or “electoral” revolutions across Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, and it demonstrated the efficiency and importance of democracy assistance.²⁵

²¹ The inflation rate in 1992-1993 is the second highest and second longest recorded inflation in the world. Uvalić, 53.

²² Uvalić, 68–71, 105.

²³ Uvalić, 125, 21.

²⁴ SAA was initially signed in June 1999. The renewal of membership in IMF and the World Bank depended on the division of Yugoslavia's debts and assets among the new states and thus was postponed until Serbia depended on the membership for reconstruction loans. Interestingly, a part of the first IMF Emergency Reconstruction Loan was used to pay off a loan given by Norway and Switzerland for paying off the “old Yugoslav” debt to IMF in an effort to access new loans. Uvalić, 84, 120–21, 126–27.

²⁵ Bunce and Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*.

While dwelling more on the ambiguous status of what is today referred to as the “October Changes” is outside of the interest of this thesis, it is important to note that despite the controversial NATO bombings of 1999, it is “democracy assistance” that got the credit for the fall of Milošević.²⁶ This assistance consisted of seemingly mundane efforts like education, training, and material resources given to three major actors: opposition parties, independent media, and civil society actors.²⁷ So even though it is Kosovo and Bosnia that are examined as popular examples of the liberal peace project, it was Serbia that, at least for a while, captured the popular imagination as an effective symbiosis of international support and rebellious local actors.²⁸

The focus on the “post” in post-Yugoslav spaces does not only occlude the international connections of Yugoslavia as already noted above, but it also allows the misreading of the current political situation in Serbia. The term “revolution” was problematised very soon after the October Changes, when people realised that the changes were not as profound as everyone believed they would be.²⁹ But this did not mean that things stayed the same. The understated aspect of this transformation are the reforms that followed instantly after 2000. They were driven by a belief in neoliberal technocracy as preached by the Washington Consensus that was implemented literally in the early 2000s, sometimes through IMF’s conditionality and in-kind help that took the form of “expert technical advice,” and sometimes by over-zealous Serbian technocrats acting in accordance with the World Bank and IMF ideals.³⁰ These economic changes were not only profound, but also under-appreciated because of the overall attention given to transitional justice and political conditionalities associated with the ICTY.³¹

While the reforms initially showed a growth in GDP, it was a “jobless growth” that characterized many transitional economies and had a “devastating impact” on the general population.³² It is this socio-economic breakdown that is often left out of accounts of the

²⁶ See, for example, Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, who argues that international support to political parties had at best an ambiguous impact on Serbian democracy. For another overview, see Bunce and Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*.

²⁷ Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 3.

²⁸ See, for example, articles in the New York Times and Foreign Affairs: Cohen, ‘Who Really Brought Down Milosevic?’; Rosenberg, ‘Revolution U’.

²⁹ For example, see the contributions in Spasić and Subotić, *R/evolution and Order*. These are early reflections on the October events.

³⁰ Uvalić, *Serbia’s Transition*, 130–33.

³¹ Uvalić refers to economic reforms as the “less explicit” part of the conditionality package. Uvalić, 129.

³² Uvalić, 132, 149.

changes in post-Yugoslav spaces. In these narratives, the gravity of social, political, and economic changes mentioned above that far transcend issues of ethnic national, and religious co-existence, is lost. In a nutshell, the interventions (and their internal critiques) that focus on peace, transitional justice, and ethnic and religious co-existence, ignore that “peace” and “normalcy” also depend on the strong welfare state that was the corner-stone of Yugoslav socialism, steady employment, and a vision of future as a modernising process of *betterment*, rather than *survival*.³³ It is precisely the difference between “survival” as the contemporary state and “normalcy” that was Yugoslavia, that permeates anthropological studies of the region and my own fieldwork experiences.³⁴

III Serbia today

The recession that developed along with the global 2008 crisis only made matters worse. Serbia today is characterised not only by worrying statistics, but also by contestation around those numbers. For example, even though the official unemployment rate ranged from 19% to 16% in 2016, the “real rate” is considerably more severe because the official statistics include informal employment and ignore the negative population growth due to negative birth rates and emigration. Similarly, the “official” average monthly income of ca. 550 euros gross (around 410 euros net) in 2016 is also disputed as drawing mostly from bigger companies and large cities. This unnaturally inflates the numbers and ignores the vast numbers of people who are receiving the legal minimum wage, those employed informally, and those employed without receiving salary (a practice that is still common in the region).³⁵

The political situation is equally deteriorating. During my fieldwork, many people who actively opposed Milošević in the 1990s described Serbia as sliding back into the not-so-covert-authoritarianism: key people from the Milošević government are once again in seats of power, with the Prime-Minister-turned-President Aleksandar Vučić being the former Minister of Information (1998-2000). Vučić’s ruling party, the SNS (Srpska

³³ See a powerful demonstration of this critique on the example of projects working to facilitate the return of refugees in BiH in Jansen, ‘The Privatisation of Home and Hope’.

³⁴ For the idea of a “return to normalcy” as a post-conflict goal in the region, see Gilbert et al., ‘Reconsidering Postsocialism from the Margins of Europe’; Greenberg, ‘On the Road to Normal’.

³⁵ Bradaš, ‘Statistika i Dostojanstven Rad [Statistics and Dignified Work]’, 9–10. This publication calculates the average at 470 euros gross (340 euros net). However, the important thing to note is that even if the higher numbers are true, they are still not enough to cover the consumer basket from the same period that came to 570 euros—meaning that the gross salary needed to cover it is more than 800 euros. Additionally, talking to people I encountered during fieldwork in Belgrade and Novi Sad also supports the thesis that the official numbers are vastly exaggerated.

napredna stranka — Serbian Progressive Party), is accumulating power and there is a notable decrease in freedom of media and political pluralism. Serbia today walks the fine line between being nominally committed to EU membership negotiations, and playing geopolitics. It keeps its ties with Russia, China, and Turkey and refuses to recognize the statehood of Kosovo, while at the same time reforming every aspect of state bureaucracy under the EU's guidance, and developing economic plans with the IMF that follow the usual orientation towards the hopes of export-oriented growth, privatisations, and welfare cut-backs. This is the setting in which I conducted roughly 10 months of fieldwork in 2016 that forms the basis for the following two chapters.

Chapter 4

Governing Youth: Non-formal education

Projects that target youth are omnipresent—whether seen as a “problem” to be contained, or a “resource” to be used, youth emerge as the natural target for international non-military interventions. This chapter will examine such projects that seek to empower youth—help them become politically active, become better citizens, and find employment. In these projects, youth is always imagined as *ambivalent* subjects of government. They are “simultaneously idealizations and monstrosities, pathologies and panaceas.”¹ But while they are ambivalent, these images are not accidental. They represent larger social and political orderings of society. By examining how youth is *imagined* in projects of intervention and how it *experiences* these practices, we can therefore inquire into larger logics and effects of that intervention.

My particular entry point for this chapter are various programmes of non-formal education (NFE). NFE is to be differentiated from formal education, which is structured from pre-school to higher education, and informal education, where the person learns individually and spontaneously.² It has been popularized throughout Europe with the emergence of the Erasmus+ programme that continued the previous Youth in Action programme (2007-2013). Youth in Action “aimed to inspire active citizenship, solidarity and tolerance and involve young people in shaping the future of the European Union.”³

NFE was especially important in Serbia due to the role of NFE and youth in bringing down Slobodan Milošević in 2000.⁴ This type of education entered the main stage of democracy aid with the cultural turn in democratisation studies. This approach, adopted by both scholars and policy makers, emphasises social capital and participation as keys in democratic transitions, and it included civic education as a standard element of the democracy aid portfolio based on the paradigm of transition.⁵ In this approach, democratic

¹ Comaroff and Comaroff, ‘Reflections on Youth’, 20.

² Space prevents an analysis of NFE and youth work in general as a field, but for a quick overview of EU involvement and the current debates, see European Commission, *Youth Work and Non-Formal Learning in Europe’s Education Landscape*.

³ ‘Youth in Action Programme’.

⁴ Erasmus+ is the continuation of Youth in Action programmes that were active from 2007 – 2013.

⁵ Carothers, ‘The End of the Transition Paradigm’, 17.

institutions and processes are no longer enough for a democracy to function. In addition, transitional societies are in need of new democratic subjects. Youth education thus emerges as a site where young people will be initiated into a democratic culture, and cultural factors causing democratic failure, such as apathy, nationalism, and bitterness, would be corrected.⁶

NFE did not stop after the popular narrative of youth bringing down Milošević ended. On the contrary, in the last decades, youth globally emerged a focal point for international donors who see youth as capable of bringing peace, development, and democracy. Analysing this increasing significance of youth today, Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock write that its popularity needs to be put into the context of the rise of global neoliberalism: the more positive identities of youth are in line with the shifting, fluid, mobile and precarious nature of ever-changing contemporary capitalism.⁷

Keeping this in mind, I approach NFE with asking two interrelated questions. First, what can the ways that these projects are practiced tell us about broader logics of intervention? And second, how do those logics shape the everyday realities of youth they target? In doing so, I join a range of scholars who examined projects that seek to empower and develop. Nina Eliasoph, for example, studied “Empowerment Projects” in the US that foster “personal transformation” in youth in the US.⁸ Julie Hemment explored state-run youth projects in Russia as an aftermath of democracy promotion that targeted the region in the 1990s.⁹ Ljubica Spaskovska studied the “last generation” of Yugoslav institutional youth politics.¹⁰ However, the only previous ethnographic engagement with NFE’s political dimension in Serbia is offered in Theodora Vetta’s unpublished PhD thesis. In one of the chapters, she offers a thick ethnographic description of a week-long training in Serbia to point out how the workshop itself is a “social intervention on the terrain of self-formation.”¹¹ All of these scholars examine these projects as sites of governmentalisation: this is where

⁶ Greenberg, ‘There’s Nothing Anyone Can Do about It’.

⁷ Sukarieh and Tannock, *Youth Rising?*, 5.

⁸ Eliasoph, *Making Volunteers*. For a critical discussion of “empowerment” in development, see Sharma, *Logics of Empowerment*.

⁹ Hemment, *Youth Politics in Putin’s Russia*.

¹⁰ Spaskovska, *The Last Yugoslav Generation*.

¹¹ Vetta, ‘Let’s Get Up!’, 84. The workshop she attended still runs annually under the same sponsorship, but I decided not to attend it in order to get a wider variety of participant experiences. Based on her description and the official website, I think the workshop in question is most similar to Erasmus+/Youth in Action workshops, who are notorious for their “tourism,” project speak, emphasis on intercultural dialogues, and overuse of colourful posters and flip charts. I think that by attending seminars which are explicitly more political, like those organised by German political foundations or those dealing with transitional justice, I got a better insight into NFE as a part of a larger governmental formation.

subjectivities are formed, politics defined, and issues demarcated. Examining how youth are “perceived, named, and represented” helps us understand the wider social, political, and economic government that engages them.¹²

The chapter starts with asking what kind of youth are imagined in NFE interventions, and proceeds by investigating how youth themselves experience these practices.¹³ NFE events allowed me to spend extended periods of time with the targets of interventions. My fieldwork in NFE consisted of attending a number of courses, seminars, and lectures. I started with a *Youth for Peace* week presented in the Introduction. I attended two Erasmus+ Youth in Action trainings organised in Serbia. I participated in a semester of a political school for youth active in right and centre-right parties funded by a German political foundation and implemented by a Serbian NGO. I participated in a seven-week course on transitional justice in Belgrade. I also occasionally attended lectures in other courses taking place in Belgrade, and I was present at numerous public lectures with educational goals. This allowed me to be familiar even with courses that I did not attend—through getting to know their reputation or speaking with people who have attended them. In addition, I conducted in-depth interviews with trainers and participants of these courses, interviewed people who work in the funding organisations and people who were active in the field of non-formal education since the early 1990s. I also gathered policy documents produced by the state, donors, and civil society organisations.

The chapter proceeds in five parts. The first part of the chapter will examine how youth was imagined in Yugoslavia. As discussed in Chapter 2, this “recovering of historical consciousness” is both a political and an analytical move. Besides making space for the subjectivities that are usually erased, it also helps understand how contemporary projects are developed in conversation with past efforts to engage youth. These past projects targeted youth as political subjects much earlier than the NFE that was a part of US-led democracy promotion in the late 1990s.¹⁴ Similarly, the expectations and experiences of these projects in Serbia have to be put in conversation with political education that took place in Yugoslavia and which already sought to shape subjectivities in particular ways.

¹² Comaroff and Comaroff, ‘Reflections on Youth, from the Past to the Postcolony’, 20.

¹³ As explained in the Introduction, I borrow the formulation of governing intent and reception from Hemment, *Youth Politics in Putin’s Russia*.

¹⁴ While examining state-led projects in contemporary Russia, Hemment, for example, emphasises that even though these projects function within a very specific narrative of Russian national greatness, the projects themselves could not be understood without inquiring into how they have built on international democracy promotion projects that targeted youth in the 1990s. Hemment, 12–13, 78.

The second part of the chapter then moves to discussing the shift from “democracy guerrillas” that democracy assistance created in the 1990s to the “political children” that were the targets of post regime-change statebuilding in Serbia. It examines how local subjects are engaged by different practices and how these practices echo in local contexts. In doing this, the section specifically moves away from pursuing the path of a cultural critique—i.e. were these events “authentic” or “internationally designed”—to pursue a positional critique—i.e. what were the effects of the particular framings of youth. The effects are captured in what I term project politics: professionalisation and proceduralism that are imagined to “purify” politics of Balkan corruption and that have reshaped the meaning of civil society, the state, and political action in general.

The third part of the chapter turns to the visions of governing unemployed youth to examine how programs of subject production are both deployed and reproduced among youth in Serbia. It approaches local subjectivities by examining a particular ethnographic artefact, the National Strategy for Youth Employment, created by a youth association in cooperation with international donors and the Serbian state. I use this document to further inquire into visions of political life presented in it and put them in conversation with observations made thus far. Most importantly the section focuses on a bifurcation of youth that underlines unemployment strategies and uncovers a rigid differentiation of subjects by power which is seemingly universal.

The fourth part of the chapter turns to different experiences—practices and narratives that resist those presented hitherto. I look at competing visions of political life advanced by my interlocutors, but also at more subtle forms of resisting with monetary re-appropriation. The section argues that these things should not be seen as outside government, but as an integral part of it.

Finally, the short concluding section will address what the things uncovered in the lives of the governed tell us about interventions today and open up some question to be pursued in Part III of the thesis.

I Youth in Yugoslavia

Contrary to readings that see the focus on youth as a novel move of neoliberal capitalism, youth in Yugoslavia was one of the constitutive pillars of socialist society. As the famous motto of “Tito—Partija—Omladina—Armija” [Tito—the Party—the Youth—the

Army] shows, youth was a crucial element of the Yugoslavian socio-political landscape.¹⁵ The development of the socialist citizen was a managed process: children in primary schools became *pioniri* [pioneers], and after seven years they became *omladina* [youth]. Youth was targeted by the now famous youth labour actions [*omladinske radne akcije*—ORA], taught politics in political schools, and were treated as “important [as] political subjects in their own right” by the federal youth organisations and its branches.¹⁶

Youth labour actions were voluntary work actions which saw more than two million youth complete a number of big infrastructural projects from the 1940s, until the last ORA in 1990. One of the most famous projects is the “Brotherhood and Unity” highway—built in a youth action between Zagreb and Belgrade, connecting my own home region to Serbia. The motto of the ORA “we build the highway, the highway builds us” [*mi gradimo autoput, autoput gradi nas*] however, points to stakes much higher than free labour. ORAs served to build socialist citizens with the spirit of “brotherhood and unity.” More than just facilitating alliances by spending time together, these actions were supposed to erase the divisions that prevented the emergence of the “socialist new men.” The urban and the rural, the poor and the rich—all were supposed to come together in building a common future.¹⁷ With time, and especially after the 1960s, ORAs’ official goals and the reasons of youth attendance started varying greatly. Although the official rationale was still hard labour, shorter working hours and more opportunities for learning and leisure were introduced when most people came to have fun and enjoy their summers.¹⁸

Another site of subject formation were the political schools and the highly institutionalised sphere of youth politics within the Party. Although only rarely mentioned in literature, these schools were presented to me in interviews with veterans of NFE as the direct antecedents of the NFE industry that emerged in the 1990s. It was in these schools that talented youth was supposed to mature into party cadres. Youth also practiced their politics in student and youth organisations that were technically a part of the state apparatus. In a recent book on the last generation active in these organisations, Spaskovska details how these networks were both *products of* and actively *participated in* creating the social and political landscape of late socialism in the 1980s. As much as they were a part of the state apparatus, they at the same time provided a platform for the critique of the regime. Using a leftist

¹⁵ Spaskovska, *The Last Yugoslav Generation*, 38.

¹⁶ Greenberg, *After the Revolution*, l. 535; Spaskovska, *The Last Yugoslav Generation*.

¹⁷ Popović, ‘Youth Labor Action’. For more on building the Brotherhood and Unity highway, see the MA thesis Vejzagić, ‘The Importance of Youth Labour Actions’.

¹⁸ Popović, ‘Youth Labor Action’. Especially p. 280, 287-290.

critique of what they saw as failed attempts at socialism, youth demanded *more* socialism: better self-management, less corrupt bureaucracy, more freedom of speech, and more employment.

At the same time, and particularly after the protests in 1968, these organisations also made space for youth political subjectivities that were not inspired only by internal criticism of Yugoslav socialism, but also by international and transnational issues. New global social issues like environmentalism, pacifism, and LGBT+ visibility became a part of what was originally imagined as a youth party branch.¹⁹ Thus, domestic and Party student organisations and politics were also a place where students practiced their geopolitical positionings. The aforementioned issues like environmentalism and sexuality already linked the students into a common feeling of “Europeanness”. Yugoslav youth politics hence engaged both “inner” or “Yugoslav-specific contestations of the socio-political framework” and “outer challenges resulting from development at international level.”²⁰ In other words, these party structures were the site of both “mainstream and alternative” politics—allowing youth to engage local politics while developing a “new transnational identity” that positioned them between the East and the West.²¹

Spaskovska underscores that the demise of these youth organisations in the late 1980s was very much a part of the broader political impasse. This was a time when different visions of reforming socialism emerged and led to power struggles that ultimately saw the demise of Yugoslavia instead of its re-imagination, and allowed Milošević to fill the power vacuum that was left behind.²² It is onto this rich history of government practices and political debate about everything from youth apathy, unemployment, sexuality, the place in the party and the state, and the overall make up of what is supposed to be a good life that democracy promoters and their NFE activities landed in the late 1990s.

II From democracy guerrillas to political children

¹⁹ Spaskovska, *The Last Yugoslav Generation*, 126.

²⁰ Spaskovska, 126.

²¹ Spaskovska, 27, 125–28. She uses a particularly powerful example of a UK punk music magazine that repeatedly printed stories of Yugoslavia as “behind the Iron Curtain.” Not only were Yugoslav bands written about in the UK, and British press read in Yugoslavia, but the magazine also printed angry replies of Yugoslav youth who advised the magazine to “ask for some education” and learn about Non-alignment and Tito’s politics.

²² Spaskovska, 161.

Some time ago... Let's say in the last decade, when you would come to [the organisation] you were a little revolutionary [*mali revolucionar*] and desired change. Now you are an individual fighting for yourself.²³

i. Democracy guerrillas

Many of the people who are now managing and implementing NFE and other civil society (CS) activities in Serbia came to be employed in CS through their involvement in these internationally aided protests. While talking to these people who started their civil society careers in the era of the democracy promotion craze, I was always presented with a juxtaposition of the *apolitical present*, with the very *political past*. In that past, subjects of NFE were not bogged down by paperwork, they did not compete with project plans, and they did not have to account for how they spent the international currencies given amidst evacuations and closures of embassies.²⁴ Below I discuss this “political” era of NFE.

In her book on the role of democracy promotion in the ousting of Milošević, Marlene Spoerri emphasises that “the bombardment of Serbia was followed by a bombardment of aid.”²⁵ While her narrative was challenged in stories I heard of aid arriving even before the end of the bombing campaign on June 10, 1999, the phrase captures the dramatic extent of democracy aid given to Serbia in the period leading to October 2000. These efforts made the Serbian “revolution” celebrated as proof that helping democracy from the outside can work and the “bulldozer revolution” became a model exported around the world.

These subjects were nothing less than what *The Guardian* called “democracy guerrillas”—hallmarks of protests that finally ousted Milošević.²⁶ NFE was crucial in the subjectivation of these democracy guerrillas. It was a large part of the intense funding of civil society and capacity building that took place in the preparation for ousting Milošević. Otpor! [Resistance!] and other groups opposing the regime were heavily aided by democracy promoters from Europe and the US and NFE played a key role in the process of organising the youth. For example, the European Youth Centre in Budapest became an important meeting point for youth NGO activists in an era when Milošević did not allow NGO

²³ Interview, Belgrade, April 7. Interviewee is an alumnus of one of the organisation's courses and is now employed as the coordinator of two courses, one of which I attended as a participant observer.

²⁴ Interview, March 21, 2016; April 2, 2016.

²⁵ Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*. The book focuses mostly on aid to political parties. For an account that focuses on civil society, see Bieber, ‘The Serbian Opposition and Civil Society’.

²⁶ I borrow the term from a 2005 Guardian article about a training in Albania which had Otpor! members present as trainers. Traynor, ‘Young Democracy Guerrillas Join Forces’.

development within the country.²⁷ More generally, many NGOs “explicitly linked alternative pedagogy, critical thinking, democracy, and the anti-Milošević movement” and NFE became a site of “active citizen engagement.”²⁸ As shown in the quote from the beginning of this section, back then, even entering the building was a political statement—a positioning of oneself against Milošević, and with Europe and the West.

Serbian youth who was protesting was labelled revolutionary as their democratic spirit was oppressed by the dictatorial regime and needed technical and financial help to express itself. What is striking in the stories of suitcases of cash that were smuggled across borders in times when foreign donors were not allowed into the country, is the perceived political maturity of aid receivers: the democratic spirit is there, it just needs a bit of a push to accomplish itself. This framing of youth as the brave bringers of change is a part of the global narrative of youth as revolutionary subjects. Sukarieh and Tannock track the same narrative from early 20th century Europe, the 1960s counter-movements, to the Arab Spring uprisings.²⁹ Interestingly, it is precisely Otpor! and NFE activities it once received, and that its members now provide, that serves as a direct link between the coloured revolutions of Eastern Europe to the protests in Tahrir Square.³⁰ Former Otpor! activist went to train people all over the world through the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (CANVAS) that was founded in 2003 by Otpor! leaders and is closely connected both with Western/Northern donors and “revolutionaries” around the globe.³¹ Thus the Serbian youth and the “revolution” they brought is both celebrated and condemned as the “prototype for all non-violent acts of deposing dictators.”³²

Because of these transnational networks, many discussions of the coloured revolutions, the agency of local youth, and the international support they received easily turn into arguments about whether those revolutions were truly local or just, as Zeinab Abul-Magd describes the events in Serbia in her comparison with Egypt, “staged.”³³ While

²⁷ Vidanović, ‘Support Was out There!’

²⁸ Greenberg, *After the Revolution*, 94.

²⁹ Sukarieh and Tannock, *Youth Rising?*, chap. 4.

³⁰ Abul-Magd, ‘Occupying Tahrir Square’; Spoerri and Joksic, ‘From Resistance to Revolution and Back Again’; Rosenberg, ‘Revolution U’; Sukarieh and Tannock, *Youth Rising?*, 103.

³¹ See their website for more information: <http://canvasopedia.org/>

³² Abul-Magd, ‘Occupying Tahrir Square’, 568.

³³ Abul-Magd, 567, 570. This debate was addressed in Serbian academia as well. Its best captured in the exchange between Slobodan Naumović who wrote a text about Otpor’s foreign support and classified it as an “imported revolution,” and Zagorka Golubović, who challenged his conclusion and methodology. Interestingly, the debate does not only concern Otpor!, but also ideas about who should speak for the region: Golubović heavily criticizes Naumović for citing American authors. Naumović, ‘„Otpor!“ Kao Postmoderni Faust

naturally attractive as it tells apart authentic rebels from foreign mercenaries, this dividing line is a lot less clear. After talking to people from all walks of life who protested *daily* and lived under the extreme Milošević oppression, one cannot easily dismiss their agency in favour of USAID designs. On the other hand, the paper (and money) trails that link the events to US democracy promotion and regime change agendas are real. Instead of deciding which is true, it is useful to ask what either reading obscures. Outside of the cultural critique which would try to decide how “authentic” these subjects and processes are, it is more useful to approach the regime change and its aftermath through a positional critique that investigates what *effects* this curious joining of local and international narratives has.

One of the results of framing youth as the revolutionary subject is the occlusion of other actors and processes that were crucial for political action.³⁴ This is precisely what happened in Serbia. The myths of brave Otpor! activists smuggling translations of Gene Sharp’s book³⁵ from NFE activities in Hungary—read as either a celebration of Serbian bravery or a condemnation of American imperial designs—occlude the incredibly diverse coalition that came together to bring down Milošević. These were not just urban youth, but provincial workers who went on strike, technocratic neoliberal parties that went to form the new government, extreme nationalist organisations, and even the notoriously radical Serbian Orthodox Church that called on the military and the police to respect the will of the people.³⁶ Neither money nor courage magically brought out people to the streets. This was a product of careful planning, smart strategizing, and organising in the streets, fields, and offices.

The particular framing of the events in 2000 changed ideas about political action. I thus approached this field with trying to understand *how* ideas of political action were changing and what is the role of international intervention in them. As Jessica Greenberg powerfully argued in her investigation of student university politics in Serbia in the 2000s, a crucial part of this process was the *translation* that was happening between values and narratives promoted in democracy promotion and their local practices.³⁷

["Otpor" – A Postmodern Faust]'; Golubović, 'Objektivna ili subjektivistička interpretacija "Otpora" [Objective or subjective interpretation of Otpor]'; Naumović, 'Was Faust a Member of "Otpor"?'; Golubović, 'Šta je normalna nauka? [What is normal science?]'.

³⁴ Sukarieh and Tannock, *Youth Rising?*, 107.

³⁵ Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy*. The book was famously translated, printed, distributed, and used by Otpor! activists. See, Sorensen, 'Humor as a Serious Strategy'.

³⁶ Stojanović, 'Democratic Revolution in Serbia'. The rest of the contributions in the same volume present insightful early reflections on the October 5 events.

³⁷ Greenberg, *After the Revolution*, ll. 326–328.

The great funding and attention given to youth is best understood not as imposing foreign interests and agencies nor as resurrecting local authentic ones—the conjuncture worked together to translate between the two and ended up in specific ways that politics are practiced. This “translation” that continued into the 2000s re-defined political action both in terms of permissible *issues* and permissible *tools*. It is this translation, or afterlife, of ideas of political action that came to dominate NFE, and intervention in the region.

ii. Political children

While the aid generally, and investments in NFE specifically, did not stop after the regime change, their subjects (d)evolved. As democracy persistently stayed out of reach, the same revolutionary youth who brought down Milošević with a mix of humour, bravery, and international democracy assistance were re-drawn as lacking that revolutionary and democratic spirit and in need of further education on how to “do democracy.” Suddenly, the things that were seen as existing and needing *material* support in the 1990s, like critical thinking and politics, were now lacking and needed to be developed. The diagnosis relied on issues of political culture and subjectivities: political culture was deficient, and people failed to act as “active citizens.”³⁸ Accordingly, the subjects of this newfound tutelage embodied in the ideology of “transition” needed to be taught “participation.”³⁹ The process of maturation was very quickly termed “Europeanisation.” The persistent socio-political issues demonstrated bluntly that democratisation does not automatically provide a happy ending, and the country and the region embarked on the process of European integration.

The maturation needed to happen both in party politics and among the general public. In party politics, NFE focused on youth as a long-term investment in the development of a party culture. A spate of foundations provided political skills and political marketing knowledge to youth and women, seeing those groups as long-term investments in parties in Serbia.⁴⁰ These courses, workshops, and trainings still happen. Funded mostly by German political foundations, they target “future leaders” who are usually already active in party politics and equip them with knowledge, skills, and networks for their oncoming political careers. Because every German party operates its political foundation with the primary goal

³⁸ Wedel, ‘USAID to Central and Eastern Europe’.

³⁹ Greenberg, ‘There’s Nothing Anyone Can Do about It’.

⁴⁰ Spoerri, *Engineering Revolution*, 133, 143, 144. She specifically uncovers how democracy assistance might have hurt Serbian politics and prevented parties from developing “meaningful political content,” despite all the “ideology building” provided by German Stiftungen and British party foundations

of a “diverse political education,” all shades of the political spectre are covered.⁴¹ These organisations’ influence is felt beyond party politics. In Alexander Vorbrugg’s words, they “contest existing political realities and create new ones.”⁴² It is this redefinition and contestation that I both observed in the workshops I attended and that was retold to me in interviews with people active in NFE in the past.

Simultaneously, the improved parties needed a better-informed voting public and a more developed civil society as their counterparts. So not only was political culture backward on a party level, but international aid proclaimed the entire population as apathetic and created “participation” as the new object of desire.⁴³ This introduced the valorisation of the local that we examined in Chapter 1: a specific type of local participation emerged in the idea of “building civil society.” Civil society was perceived as both lacking and a key to a functioning democracy. And it was to be built by “building capacities:” teaching the necessary skills and values through NFE. Thus from being *democracy guerrillas*, Serbian youth (and adults) quickly became *political children*.⁴⁴

NFE thus cannot be discussed without addressing civil society more generally. The theoretical connection is made in the narrative of building democracy by building capacities for civil society. Moreover, most providers of NFE are NGOs themselves and the implicit goal of these activities has always been framed around the participants staying in the sector [*u sektoru*]: themselves becoming a part of civil society, by project writing, volunteering, or becoming NGO employees.

⁴¹ There is surprisingly little literature on the activities of German political foundations despite their overtly political goals and omnipresence. The little research that exists, focuses on the impact of the foundations on party politics. The literature seems to draw the conclusion that German political foundations have little or no effect in the region because parties and unions they support fail to become significant political actors. I disagree on two points. First, in party politics, at least the Konrad Adenauer Foundation provides legitimacy to SNS (the ruling party in Serbia). By facilitating access to the German Government, the Foundation helps provide the image of Vučić as a competent leader who is brining Serbia “back to Europe.” Second, outside of party politics, these foundations seem to be crucial in supporting more systemic research and activism on alternative visions of government. While I do not want to judge the effectiveness of these actions versus their obvious entanglement with the political economies of civil society in the region, it is undeniable these narratives do exist in the region *because* of the funds and projects provided by the foundations. Moreover, outside of party politics, the sheer number of young people who attend activities organised by these foundations warrant more curiosity about the effect they have on everyday lives of at least a part of the population. For some literature focusing on German political foundations and party politics, see Erdmann, ‘Hesitant Bedfellows: The German Stiftungen and Party Aid in Africa’; Dakowska, ‘Beyond Conditionality’; Phillips, ‘Exporting Democracy’.

⁴² Vorbrugg, ‘Governing through Civil Society?’, 137.

⁴³ Greenberg, *After the Revolution*, 88; see also Greenberg, ‘There’s Nothing Anyone Can Do about It’.

⁴⁴ I borrow the term from Buden, ‘Children of Postcommunism’.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of studies on civil society in the Balkans and Eastern Europe.⁴⁵ Anthropologists' contributions have been especially valuable because they have "particularized and made concrete" the buzzword and showed how a Western European idea has many different referents across Europe.⁴⁶ Such concretization means abandoning civil society as pre-signified analytical concept and instead exploring its making and use in existing politics.⁴⁷ In examining the changes in the lived meanings of civil society and the consequent redefinitions of the state and its subjects, I join Greenberg who has similarly examined the "aftermath" of the revolution in Serbia. However, while Greenberg's work focused specifically on university student politics, here I want to more closely examine what happened on the level of civil society and the state as I saw them through my own participation in NFE and through stories told to me by my interlocutors.

iii. A new way of governing

a. Issues and tools of political action

My first Erasmus+ event was a week in Novi Sad where youth from the region and beyond came to discuss social inclusion. The week was organised as a "training for trainers"—a special type of event within Erasmus+ that is supposed to raise the next generation of workshop trainers. I was unsure about my participation—topics of inclusion and exclusion seemed to be for "real youth workers" and I was worried that I would be expected to have such experience. However, as soon as I met the rest of the participants, it became clear that my worries were unwarranted—experience in youth work that I worried about was not high on the agenda. While relieving my own anxiety, realising that the title of the workshop is *not* the agenda, left me wondering what is. The "what's the point" question which began in Istanbul and that I retold in the Introduction loomed large over the week in Novi Sad. We were put in a dilapidated hotel outside of the city, fed sub-par food, and had session after session in one of the unoccupied (by us, because we were the only guests of the hotel) rooms.

⁴⁵ As most relevant to the approach in this thesis, I would point out the works of Marek Mikuš and Theodora Vetta that are cited throughout the thesis.

⁴⁶ Hann, 'Introduction: Political Society and Civil Anthropology', 2. For an early account see Hann and Dunn, *Civil Society Challenging Western Models*. For a range of studies on the Balkans, see the edited volume Bojicic-Dzelilovic, Ker-Lindsay, and Kostovicova, *Civil Society and Transitions in the Western Balkans*.

⁴⁷ Bilić, 'A Concept That Is Everything and Nothing'. offers a threefold justification of this abandonment: it is logically incoherent because it encompasses both "civil" and "uncivil" associations, it is historically removed from the Western European context in which it was originally developed, and it obscures ideological and political investments of its actors.

After going back to my field notes, I realised that “the point” of the week was actually mentioned in passing by Maja, one of the three facilitators, in the opening session. After presenting the schedule and the official aims of the week, she told us that she and the other facilitators are “there for us” all week and invited us to use their comprehensive knowledge of Erasmus+ to give our projects a “European dimension.”⁴⁸ What this European dimension *is* became clear only after coming back to my fieldnotes after talking with dozens of other people and triangulating my own conclusions with the vast literature on youth projects.

The European dimension of our projects determines both the permissible *goals* that we might focus on, and the *tools* for achieving them. In the opening session, we were invited to draw a poster of inclusions and exclusion that we find particularly problematic in our countries. A girl from Macedonia drew a shoe to illustrate the expanding textile industry in Macedonia in which women are paid less than the cost of one pair of the shoes they produce. A young man from Italy drew a map of the famous boot to show us how the unification of Italy led to the biggest inequality: that between the developed north and the lagging south of the country. A young professional from Greece highlighted how one of the effects of the crisis in Greece was the EU literally stopping all funding for Erasmus+ activities—a powerful illustration of the Greek position in the Union.

During this opening, it already became clear that we were not there to talk or worry about such “structural” or “state” issues—there were specific problems and specific solutions that we were nudged towards. The point was perhaps best illustrated in one of the last sessions that had us presenting our own ideas that we were to develop with the new tools we were given. Matija is a very young, but also very ambitious man from Republika Srpska. He spent the week insisting that we talk more about “politics.” While explicitly thrilled to be given an opportunity to travel and meet young people from all over Europe, Matija also used coffee breaks to express his frustration with the “apolitical” character of the workshop. The topics that interested him did not have a place in the planned sessions. For example, he wanted to debate the difference between the EU democracy without growth, and the Belarusian dictatorship with almost full employment. In his mind the logic was bullet-proof: in an EU funded workshop on political work, we should be discussing EU politics.

Matija went to an international school and was not afraid to express his opinion in English. Towards the end of the week, his small team was tasked with devising solutions for

⁴⁸ The discussion of this event is based on my fieldwork journal from January 2016 and recordings of the interviews with participants.

geographic exclusion. Matija combined his ambition and schooling to come up with an idea of an FDI led road construction. He presented the idea enthusiastically: if people are isolated, let us build them a road! Maja, our trainer, was visibly annoyed—on this last day of the workshop, have we *still* not learned *what is fundable*? She was as exhausted as we were, and frankly showed her annoyance with a rhetorical question: “In which of your countries do NGOs build roads?” People looked down—even though this is supposed to be *non*-formal education, we easily occupied the roles of *formally* “bad students.” Matija remained silent. I assumed he is not used to being wrong and I felt bad for him. In an effort to save his idea by at least starting a discussion, I mentioned that NGOs might actually have a role: they could organise a campaign to demand the road, start a petition, or design and implement public awareness project that would show the importance of such a project and build support. Matija was the only one who agreed and the topic, just like all “state” issues throughout the week, was quickly dropped.

These short examples capture a larger delineation of permissible *problems* and permissible political *action* for dealing with them. The striking thing about representations drawn in the opening session is the structural character of the problems described: in an era where structural politics are supposedly replaced by individualism and responsabilisation, many young people instinctively presented structural issues as the defining characteristics of their national experiences. However, it was precisely these problems that we were told are *outside* of possible political action. That day, and the following seven, we were constantly told that we are here to talk about “individuals” and not “states.” And since it is states who frame the issues just described, there was no room for pursuing matters we found important.

As the example with Matija shows, the responsabilisation worked in making the *citizens* and the NGOs they supposedly make, rather than any larger institution, responsible for change. Every conversation that might have led into discussions on redistribution—whether in terms of labour rights in Macedonia, regional inequality in Italy, or roads in BiH—was silenced. We were supposed to think in terms of cultural centres, photo exhibitions, and craft fairs. Vetta’s work strongly demonstrates how the seminar she attended “was not just creating a particular kind of actor or enhancing a particular subjectivity that would assume the responsibility of action; it was also demarcating the choice and the possibilities of the *action itself*.”⁴⁹ In my, as well as Vetta’s observation, the possibilities

⁴⁹ Vetta, ‘Let’s Get Up!’, 86. Emphasis added.

were tied to micro-projects, cultural topics, and tolerance. Any discussion of action that would focus on *structural* issues was quickly abandoned.

This limitation of political action to permissible issues has been well explored in studies of NGOization, globally, as well in the Balkans.⁵⁰ However, I want to highlight here that seeing this NGOization of political action as a *lived experience* complicates these interpretations. Out of 30 participants, I was only one of two people who had never attended an event like this before. This means that most participants have already gone through other projects that explained to them the permissible coordinates. Yet, they came back to them in all the sessions and in all coffee breaks, dinners, and outings. Moreover, during our week in Novi Sad, we discussed gender, class, sexuality, race and precarity in our free time, although there was no time for them in the sessions. The added value of Erasmus+ projects that see people living together is precisely the time that allows for questions and interests to form around so many different individual lives. Getting to know each other inevitably led to curiosity and what Eliasoph termed “possibly fruitful perplexity.”⁵¹ Just because we did not pursue them during official sessions, does not mean that we did not discuss these topics—topics that might have remained unsaid if we were not put in a hotel outside of Novi Sad together. Here, NGOization stops being a *complete* process of global neoliberal re-shaping. A closer look uncovers that the silencing was obviously incomplete—the practices of neoliberal governmentality do not create *the homo oeconomicus*.

Besides determining *what* is fundable—in terms of both problems and solutions—the European dimension should also be reflected in the *way* that projects are developed and implemented. Among the tools that we were taught, there was also the valorisation of the local in the form of encouraging participation, or “not writing projects *for* people, but *with* people.” The former was very much a matter of getting the translations right, but the latter was a more theoretical issue in the group. Many participants were very much aware that people who are most excluded do not take part in projects like this and thus it will rarely be possible to write *with* them. Many in the group also admitted that in their work they speak to local governments, schools and other institutions that might have insights into what marginalised groups need. For example, a young man working with Roma kids regularly spoke to their teachers to find out more about what is happening. This reliance on the state

⁵⁰ Vukov, ‘Seven Theses’; Sampson, ‘Weak States, Uncivil Societies and Thousands of NGOs: Benevolent Colonialism in the Balkans’; Sampson, ‘From Forms to Norms’; Sampson, ‘Too Much Civil Society? Donor-Driven Human Rights NGOs in the Balkans’; Vetta, “‘Democracy Building’ in Serbia’; Vetta, ‘Revived Nationalism versus European Democracy’; Mikuš, ‘What Reform?’

⁵¹ Eliasoph, *Making Volunteers*, xvii.

and local governments was judged: even though we did not discuss whether the state can really have the best information (for example, asking the school teachers what kids in a town might need), it was made very clear that this is the incorrect way—a way that loses sight of participation and empowerment that we are supposed to strive for. The fact that our *own* agenda-setting was ignored and silenced all week did not seem to interrupt the celebration of “participation” that we were supposed to encourage with others.

Once we were put in small groups to develop our own group projects, my exhaustion led me to ask four of my colleagues out-loud: is the goal here to learn to write a project that will get funded by Erasmus+, or are we here to actually think in a grassroots way about issues we want to work on and learn to solve them in a non-patronising way? Nikola, a very experienced Erasmus+ user understood me completely and translated in simple words: “Some of us here manage organisations, you [Katarina] have personal projects, but they [the trainers] *do Erasmus+* and they expect the feedback to be Erasmus+.” And the way to do Erasmus+ feedback is to emphasise any possible trespassing of the program’s governmentalized parameters: short, smart, and reportable. The way to get funded is through framing our ideas in “project management” terms and phrases and Erasmus+ participation. Practically, this translates into thinking in phases and making goals manageable and achievable before anything else.⁵² We are not there to practice politics, but to become project, or Erasmus+, *professionals*.

Here, we see the same effects of neoliberal governmentality that Mikuš noted in Serbian civil society in general: not as completely abolishing political action, but “redirect[ing] it to actively promote the autonomisation of individuals and society, their constitution as self-governing subjects driven by market rationality.”⁵³ The constant applying, listing, and evaluating of these projects that we were force-fed in the many workshop I attended is the perfect example of such a market rationality.⁵⁴

⁵² Vetta, ‘Let’s Get Up!’

⁵³ Mikuš, ‘Civil-Society Building’, 13.

⁵⁴ It is also worth noting that Eliasoph finds wider echoes of this phase- or short-term thinking. The reportable objectives, measurable targets, and short-term frames resonate with larger narratives that youth today have to navigate. She writes: “Some of the lessons, however, seem to be useful mainly for creating citizens who will placidly accept contemporary government’s increasingly short-term projects; who will not panic about short-term employment, in an unsteady job market; who will feel calm about short-term marriage; not become passionately attached to any people or ideas: citizens who will change their souls rather than their conditions.” Eliasoph, *Making Volunteers*, xvii–xviii.

b. State, citizens, and civil society

These ideas of permissible and professionalised political action echo in much wider fields than small youth workshops—they have shaped civil society and the state more generally in Serbia. This was obvious in speaking to an NGO worker in an organisation that was started during anti-Milošević protests and then grew to be the partner organisation of the EU's TACSO (Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisation).⁵⁵ Unlike other NGO workers who would often lament this professionalization as taking them away from community work and trapping them in endless paperwork and donor politics, Danijela was clear about the division of labour: grassroots organisation do activism, while organisations like hers serve to provide the technocratic expertise. Her organisation, however, provides the expertise in the form of NFE activities designed specifically for NGOs: how to write a project, how to develop a strategy, how to fundraise. Thus even in her own narrative, the grassroots are helped by *professionalizing them*, not by someone else doing the “professional part” for them. Most obviously, this professionalization excludes those grassroots organisations that are unable or unwilling to engage in “project speak.” But the consequences are far greater. The professional networks created cement the existing flows of resources and power, and establish a control of money, personnel, knowledge and concepts.⁵⁶ Moreover, it also leads to creating professionals whose expertise has purchase across multiple sectors.

The professionalization that starts with NFE activities in late teens and early adulthood creates professionals who are not limited to working in the civil society. The role of NFE in this cycle is recognised. The same person employed in the TACSO NGO and quoted above emphasised that people “in the sector” probably attend five or six of those “little schools” [*školicе*] I am interested in before getting employment.⁵⁷ Many year-long courses emphasise that the networks that they make long outlive the courses in question. We thus see an emergence of a specific class of actors who move between international projects, local NGOs, and different government offices.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ TACSO mission is defined as “to increase and improve the capacity and actions of CSOs as well as their democratic role. Through TACSO’s capacity building activities, support and assistance, the aim is to achieve a strengthened civil society and to stimulate a civil society-friendly environment and culture.” It is reserved for civil society in countries not yet part of the EU because CSOs are seen as “key actors in supporting their country’s accession process.” ‘What Is TACSO?’

⁵⁶ Sampson, ‘Weak States, Uncivil Societies and Thousands of NGOs: Benevolent Colonialism in the Balkans’.

⁵⁷ Interview, March 14, 2016.

⁵⁸ Janine Wedel’s work on aid in Eastern Europe is a good example of the importance of (in)formal networks in aid. See Wedel, “‘Studying Through’ a Globalizing World”; Wedel, *Collision and Collusion*. In the Balkans, much of the research on this topic comes from the field of critical policy studies. For example, see the edited

In such a world, it becomes increasingly difficult to classify actors: a person working in a big INGO can move to a bank or a Ministry the next day. Accordingly the difference between the institutions gets blurred. This re-working of the state-civil society relation was even more complicated by the changes that happened after the regime-change. It was civil society who became the government after the overthrow of Milošević and the most obvious effect of the massive support to civil society during 2000s was the entrance of civil society actors and social movement leaders into official politics. One of my interviewees who has been working in a big NFE organisation since mid-1990s described the 2000 events as “waking up one day and discovering that you personally know the entire Cabinet.”⁵⁹ Similarly, when I asked NGO workers about the biggest changes in their work, they always spoke about the difficulty of changing their relationship to the state: from working to bring down a government, to becoming the government itself. Besides obviously complicating the conceptualisation of civil society as a limit to the state, this also changed the motivations for attending NFE activities and working in civil society more generally. As an interviewee explained, people went from using NFE and NGOs to *confront* political power, to seeing them as an opportunity to *gain* political power through the existing networks.⁶⁰

While the civil society and party politics grew closer and closer, civil society, with its higher wages and exciting work environments, still retained its specific allure. In discussing this topic, an NGO employee summarised the feeling:

“I mean, it’s a lot easier like this—I sit here, the AC is on, blinds down, we’re having a nice chat... better than being out on the campaign trail on some market trying to convince some people and getting spat on, cursed, and insulted. And that’s all a part... a part of politics. So, there is definitely glamour here [in civil society]. The majority, a large part, of, let’s say educated people [*obrazovanog sveta*] would like to exert some government [*bi volela da vrši neku vlast*], but would not like to fight for it, would prefer to be handed it on a platter.”⁶¹

volumes Thomas and Bojicic-Dzelilovic, *Public Policy Making in the Western Balkans*; Deacon and Stubbs, *Social Policy and International Interventions in South East Europe*; Clarke, *Making Policy Move*; and Stubbs, ‘Flex Actors and Philanthropy’; Stubbs, ‘Networks, Organizations, Movements’; Stubbs, ‘Stretching Concepts Too Far?’ Wedel termed these actors “flexians” and their networks “flex nets.” These are: “the new players and networks of power that do not restrict themselves to activities in any one area. Rather, through their activities, they connect state with private, bureaucracy with market, political with economic, macro with micro, and global with national, all the while making public decisions—decisions backed by the power of the state.” Wedel, *Shadow Elite*, x–xi.

⁵⁹ Interview, March 21, 2016

⁶⁰ Interview, April 7, 2016.

⁶¹ Interview, April 2, 2016

Even though it might be “nicer” to sit in the NGO office than be in party politics, NGO workers still became valuable assets for the state government. Once the “return to Europe” began, it was NGO workers who knew how to write projects, deal with international organisations, and use English. Skills gained through NFE and used to bring down a government suddenly became needed to make government possible. Moreover, the conditions set by the EU focused on cooperation between the state and civil society. The performance of these networks is sometimes theatrically absurd. I witnessed it when I attended the consulting meeting for CSOs and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological development, organised by the Office for the Cooperation with Civil Society.⁶² The NGO Working Group meeting for Educational Reform had about 80 CSO representatives and several Government officials. CSOs were demanding change, and the officials convincing them they are doing everything that was possible to perform the best they can. Early in the morning, a representative of one of the biggest NGOs in Serbia raised her hand in the Q&A. But she did not start with a question. She started by congratulating the ruling party, whom I assume was represented by the Ministry officials, for being re-elected earlier that week. There was an actually audible gasp in the room: independent media and civil society have been warning about the growing authoritarian tendencies of the current government for a while, and both the election campaign and the actual election were mired with irregularities. Seeing my extremely surprised face, a young professional that I already knew leaned over: “No surprise there, everyone knows they get most of the *line 481*.”⁶³ The networks started in NFE school and carried into civil society thus did not change only civil society, but also brought about the NGOization of the state.

This overlap between the state and civil society was already examined in Mikuš’ study of the creation of the Serbian Civil Society Law in 2009, and the starting of the Office for Cooperation with the Civil Society in 2011. In both events, personal ties played a more important role than a strict division between governmental and non-governmental titles and Mikuš brings to fore these “informal networks and interstitial arenas of power.”⁶⁴ It is necessary to ask how international politics are shaped by and shape these interstitial arenas.

⁶² The meeting took place on April 25, 2016, in Belgrade. A short summary can be accessed from ‘Izveštaj o Konsultativnom Sastanku Ministarstva Prosvete [Report from the Consultative Meeting of the Ministry of Education and CSOs]’.

⁶³ This budget line relates to all state and municipal NGO funding and is officially called “donations for non-governmental organisations.” However, the budget line also finances youth and sport organisations, religious associations, and political parties, thus adding to the funding confusion of the third sector in Serbia.

⁶⁴ Mikuš, ‘Informal Networks’.

c. *Project politics: economism and proceduralism*

NFE practices that I observed, and the experiences of their targets that go on to work and live in civil society in Serbia, point to the very political changes that the supposedly apolitical NFE and civil society building brought to Serbia. The simultaneous professionalization of NGOs and NGOization of the state are a part of a larger process that I call *the projectivization of politics*. The cooperation between international and domestic actors in the late 1990s and early 2000s did not only help bring down Milošević, but it also translated into a very specific vision of the ordered relationship between the state and the civil society.⁶⁵ This specific vision of governing utilizes seemingly technical concepts like budget discipline, audit, efficiency, and competition, and at the same time invites the civil society as a partner in this administrative rule, and as a competitor in the field of public services provision.⁶⁶ There are multiple dimensions to this projectivization of politics: a specific form of participation for both individuals and communal action, a market rationality as economism in which funding becomes the legitimizing tool for political ideas, an over-reliance on transparency, meritocracy, and expertise as supposedly apolitical ideals, and the proceduralism which dominates the public discourse today.

Another important feature of projectivized politics is the need for external legitimization: while there might be many doubts about how accepted or not EU integration process is in the eyes of the Serbian public, it is obvious that there is no political alternative to Europe.⁶⁷ This powerful pairing of progressive politics with “Europeanisation” shapes the political context by further professionalizing NGOs, both directly through TACSO and funding, and indirectly by limiting the visions of permissible political action. This not only detaches NGOs from their constituencies and excludes alternative dialogues that may better fit local contexts,⁶⁸ but also affects everyday political subjectivities. In other words, it does not only shape civil society by determining what is fundable and what is not, but it also defines the limits of possible political imaginaries. I witnessed these in the many “problem oriented” group assignments we were given in different workshops: Matija was chastised by not only the trainer, but also his colleagues for thinking about a road in an assignment dealing

⁶⁵ Greenberg, *After the Revolution*, 21.

⁶⁶ Mikuš, ‘Civil-Society Building’, 13.

⁶⁷ This is more than a catchphrase. The May 2008 election campaign revolved around two groups who claimed that Europe in fact, does, or does not, have an alternative, and explicitly stated so in their campaign slogans and group titles. For more details, see Mikuš, “‘European Serbia’ and Its ‘Civil’ Discontents”, 6.

⁶⁸ For a specific example of how this unfolded in LGBT politics, see Bilić, ‘Europeanization, LGBT Activism, and Non-Heteronormativity in the Post-Yugoslav Space’, 9, and the rest of the articles in the special edition.

with ameliorating rural isolation when everyone knows that NGOs cannot be concerned with infrastructure; unemployment was instinctively connected to a faulty educational system causing reduced “employability” instead of any examination of possible other structural causes; corruption was to be treated as an effect of “mentality,” rather than capitalist economy. These negotiations, however mundane they may seem, capture more general discussions of who counts as a political subject, what counts as legitimate political action, and what claims can be made.⁶⁹ And it is within these boundaries that youth navigate another constitutive part of their lives — unemployment.

III (Un)employed youth

At the end of one of the sessions of political school organised in cooperation of a local Serbian leftist party and the UK Labour party, a participant who had to leave early said goodbye to his colleagues by “wishing [them] the best of luck with the election and speedy employment.”⁷⁰ The reference to the election was somewhat understandable: the course I was attending was funded by a political foundation, and even though the party that ran it was marginal, it was expected that everyone there had political ambitions in the upcoming elections. The employment reference, however, struck me as both unusual and essential — what does political education have to do with (un)employment? It was *not* unusual in that room because everyone at all times understood that people who attend these workshops are unemployed. This normalcy also made it essential.

His comment resonated with discussions that happened in the breaks of the workshops I attended. These revolved around applications, CVs, job openings in specific NGOs, surprisingly exploitative labour practices of those NGOs, hopes, expectations to be rewarded, and disappointments when those rewards were missing. These observations did not fit into my expectations of what NFE is about in Serbia. Going into fieldwork and being familiar with the discourse of the Balkans as still lacking in all things democratic, I expected to find stories of revolutionary Otpor! subjects and troubled, but improvable, “apathetic” political culture. However, I found these stories only over coffees with people reminiscing about the days when aid, and the education it funded, was “political.” In the courses I participated in, I heard stories of unpaid internships, employability, and maintaining stability

⁶⁹ Vorbrugg, ‘Governing through Civil Society?’, 146. makes the same argument after working with a German political foundation in Ukraine.

⁷⁰ Fieldwork journal, March 18, 2016.

beyond anything else. The *unemployed youth* was NFE's third subject after democracy guerrillas and political children of the last three decades.

An Erasmus+ trainer capture the shift well in an interview:

We have an “inflation of diplomas”... like everyone needs a diploma. And then lots of people who already have the possibilities [*moгуćnosti*], who have been to university, now they all go to youth work *eventi*. And this made youth work *eventi* and trainings become ways for these people to get more diplomas. And now you have a new branch of recognition, and this is recognition of knowledge obtained at a seminar... This never used to be a part of the discussion. The discussion used to be to recognize youth work as a system that supports people to participate, become part of society, include the excluded... The focus was always on the ones who are in the biggest shit, and this has now changed. Now it's like “recognize my diploma so I can get a job”—an interesting new moment.

Youth in Action became an employment service. Unfortunately, employment service meaning that we, like, train youth to be super employable. And Youth in Action began as building solidarity, intercultural understanding... yea yea yea... All those values [*jve ono vrednosno*], and it ended up as “let's build super employable young people since they are complaining that they cannot find jobs.”⁷¹

The trainer's narrative is a reflection of a larger focus on youth unemployment in the global economy and international politics. As Sukarieh and Tannock emphasise, the post-2008 crisis in employment has been framed as *youth* unemployment above anything else.⁷² With the youth unemployment rate moving between close to 50% in 2013 and estimated at 30% in 2016, it is obvious that youth in Serbia not only failed in the democratic transition, but it also foundered in the economic one. The popular images that explain economic failure and unemployment present specific images of both the state and the population. The state is oppressive and harasses entrepreneurs only to fund the politicians' dependence on rent from corruption. And employees, especially those in the public and non-profit sector, are described as “socialist,” implying that they are “given desks” in offices and a secure income, but no real work. Even youth unemployment is often explained by a lack of entrepreneurship —being so spoiled as to decline moving to another region or accepting a low wage—general “inactivity,” or the failure to be creative and think outside of the box to create marketable products and services. While I am not equipped to judge the validity of these claims beyond instinctively connecting unemployment to the mass de-industrialization which followed an extremely flawed privatisation process, what I find most interesting is the power these images hold across cultural, political, and economic debates in the country.

⁷¹ Interview, Belgrade, February 21, 2016.

⁷² Sukarieh and Tannock, *Youth Rising?*, 56–57.

It is important to note that I did not find these images and explanations just when attending “employability” events. I was primarily interested in ideas of political action and thus attended events that focus on political and social topics. Yet, unemployment and “employability” that is supposed to resolve it haunted every event I attended. It did not emerge from program plans, but from experiences of people who navigated both NFE and unemployment in Serbia. In the story of unemployment, NFE, even in its “political” version, emerges in two ways. First, people treat these events as CV embellishments and “collect diplomas” both to kill time while unemployed and as a form of entrepreneurial betterment of self—a sentiment captured in the trainer’s comments quoted above. Second, NFE serves as an entry point to the professionalized networks discussed above who move through both local and international civil society, the state, and the private sector.

The latter point is best illustrated in an interview with Marina, a young professional who was the project manager for the semester-long course I attended in Belgrade. She herself was a graduate of a different course in the same organisation and this was her first *paid* employment in civil society. In a conversation with her, I wanted to make sense of the incredible motivation and determination that I observed in the students who I met:

KK: I look at all these young people—they work, they study, they attend so many non-formal education programs. Where does the motivation come from?

Marina: From the first piece of information when choosing a university somewhere, I don’t think it’s very different in Croatia or anywhere else, that you simply... You... the most important challenge in growing up is that you have to equip yourself [*osposobiti se*] for the labour market, which is quite closed... And then your... I mean, it is simply not enough that you just get a university degree and that you are academically...on any level, even on the highest level... It’s not enough. In this way, you have to master skills and knowledges in most areas, the most that you can, so that you can expect that you can potentially be... I think these are serious... This is what [senior employee of the organisation] best describes as literally the return of the times of the precariat. We are all afraid of jobs in some... If everything will be ok, if we will have a salary, if everything will be ok tomorrow... Will it be this way or that way...? All these are... The labour market conditions you [*uslovi te*]. But the good side of this is that really everyone is then all over the place. And I really think that a young person... it’s only an excuse to say “I am studying at a university.” I’m telling you: I studied and finished in time [*u roku*].⁷³ By then I already had two jobs when I was finishing, and I think this can be accomplished... It’s just... Just good organisation, good plan, and serious motivation. And the motivation firstly comes from the outside,

⁷³ This qualification talks to the problem excessive time needed to obtain a higher education degree in the region. For many, and especially before the Bologna process, a four-year degree can take up to eight years to finish. The average time to finish a four-year degree before the Bologna process was officially at 7.28 years. Jovanović et al., ‘Social Dimension of Studying in Serbia’, 54.

I think in our growing up, and then it somehow quickly moves to the inside. When you are already finishing your degree and you really start to really want this... And somehow these two connect.

There are a few fascinating parts of Marina's narrative: the most important challenge being equipping yourself for the market, the feeling of always being "not enough," the acceptance of the precarious existence as a given that can be ameliorated by improving oneself and becoming better at navigating the precariat, the "excuses" that *others* might make, the individualist meritocratic approach that celebrates one having a "good organisation" and "serious motivation." And, perhaps most importantly, the source of that motivation is coming from the outside: from the labour market, from the people encouraging you, from the opportunities presented, and threats perceived. And then "moving inside," to become a part of the subjectivation as a successful *homo oeconomicus* in neoliberal times.

NFE here comes out as a strategy of improvement of oneself. The ethos of entrepreneurship which is proposed as a solution was introduced with the first discussion of "transition." However, entrepreneurship here relates to more than just starting your own business—it relates to man-enterprise not only in an economic, but also in an anthropological sense.⁷⁴ In such a view, neoliberalism becomes governmentality in the sense used by Dardot and Laval discussed in the Introduction—encompassing "the totality of human action" to refashion it along the ideas of self-enterprise and competition."⁷⁵ And the benefits of NFE are great and real. People learn how to navigate bureaucracies with entrepreneurial confidence, they become used to taking meeting notes, they become fluent in project talk, they gain experience in working in English, and they meet people who they will be able to turn to for any skills that they might be missing.

More than providing CV skills, NFE also offers an entry point into the employment networks that are otherwise out of reach. This happens through an implicit promise that CSOs in which you work or take courses might offer employment. This was retold to me in many ways, with positive and negative outcomes. When people were bypassed after years of volunteering and attending and facilitating courses, they were not afraid to be direct: they expected "some type of employment" and felt wronged when it was withheld. Moreover, the Erasmus+ trainers are notoriously devoid of any kind of certification, thus making it possible for "anyone" to be employed as a trainer and get access to wages several times higher than

⁷⁴ Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 116.

⁷⁵ Dardot and Laval, 103.

the averages for the countries in the region. More than facilitating the emergence of closed networks, i.e. you will always hire people who you, or someone else from your network, already know, this also leads to questioning the motives of employment in civil society. As explained by an Erasmus+ trainer:

“It’s more it being the moment that they understand... however strange that word may be, which is used by the European Union — “opportunity” — you have financial opportunity... Then people get little dollar signs in their eyes [*dolarčići*]... Like, here, there’s money that we should take. And regretfully, there are more and more trainers who are there because they know this is a job that can be well paid.”⁷⁶

These expectations can be interpreted both as “strategic use” that somehow stays outside of the reach of power, and “buying into” these narratives. As Müller shows in his study of state education in Russia, some youth really do see competition for the game that it is and learn to play it without necessarily identifying with its underlying ideological assumptions.⁷⁷ Similarly, many youth that I met were aware of “the game” they were presented with. They played not because they instantly believed in the promises of meritocracy that they could observe as false first-hand, but because they deemed this route as having the best chances to end in employment. Making a clear distinction on when exactly one starts to internalise the rules that one is obeying misses the more far reaching consequences of these techniques of power.

While worrying about (un)employment, these youth thus participate in the projectivization of politics. Depoliticisation is then a lot less spectacular than an imperial plot. On the contrary, it is the product of real people trying to take care of their very real needs. By doing so, they are (re)shaping civil society itself. The civil society does not work just to communicate the needs of the private sector to the state and instruct it how to organise its population, but it is supposed to respond by offering trainings and NFE activities which will ameliorate the lack of skills and entrepreneurial spirit—stepping in as the service provider for the failed formal educational system. And the subjects themselves not only lower their expectation in salaries and work conditions, but also invest their time and emotion into NFE, internships, and volunteering to increase their value as human capital.

Another effect of these practices is the harnessing of human potential. Civil society is expected to absorb those most determined to work on changing things by providing them

⁷⁶ Interview with Erasmus+ trainer, February 18, 2016.

⁷⁷ Müller, ‘Education and the Formation of Geopolitical Subjects’, 8.

with jobs that bring with them a very specific lifestyle and identity. Many of the young NGO workers and volunteers would cautiously voice their disgust at seeing the NGO sector, which is supposed to be changing society for the better, exploit, and in some instances actually harass, its employees and volunteers. But more than this irony of separating politics from economy to the extent that one can be politically progressive while relying on exploitative labour, the NGO effect among socially and politically conscious young adults in Serbia demonstrates how “capitalism incorporates values and dispositions supposed to be inimical or external to market relations, leaving nothing ‘outside’ of its reach.”⁷⁸ They have ideas of social change, collective action, and sometimes radical transformations, but doing the best they can means becoming cogs in the big project machine—not because they are naïve victims of neoliberal governmentality, but because they are savvy navigators of modern political and economic realities.⁷⁹

IV Visions of governing unemployment

While researching the Roof Youth Organisation of Serbia [*Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije*—KOMS], I saw they created the National Program for Employment of Youth. I contacted Marko, the person in charge of it in KOMS, and set up a morning coffee meeting. The place where we met is not a place where I would imagine “youth” to go. It was one of Belgrade’s nicer *kafanas* and Marko did not look like someone who is involved in youth work. His round and smiling face was friendly and talkative, but the rest of his demeanour did not fit my expectations—he was wearing generic blue “dad” jeans and a button-up shirt underneath an orange jumper, completed with a big watch that shone as he ate his breakfast. While trying to catch my breath in a restaurant that was clearly out of my price range, I felt like I was faced with a young corporate professional, and not someone in the youth sector.

Marko started with rehearsing the critique of donor driven agendas and saying that everyone is “into employment” these days: “even organisations that did sexual education are now employment experts!” In contrast, he was very proud of the National Program as a product of expertise: it was presented even to the Prime Minister and Marko was sure it will be adopted once the whole election craze is over.⁸⁰ To help me understand the importance of

⁷⁸ Vrašti, *Volunteer Tourism in the Global South*, 57.

⁷⁹ I often wondered what these young adults would be doing if they were not involved in the NGO world of projects and strategies. This thesis was put forward by Ghodsee who investigated the “translation” of feminism from Western donors to Eastern Europe. One of the consequences she identifies is that “NGOs divert women from social movements and co-opt their potential leaders.” Ghodsee, ‘Feminism-by-Design’, 748.

⁸⁰ The election (fraud) craze went on for another couple of unexpected months.

the document, he listed names of ministers, governmental officers, and domestic, EU, and UN strategies that were involved and consulted in creating the Program. I found them impossible to catch and make sense of, but Marko was proud of the names and acronyms he was invoking. They showed that, unlike “those other organisations,” he actually *is* an expert on employment. The more “procedures” he listed, the fairer and less biased I was supposed to perceive the document; and the safer he and others involved in making it were from accusations of corruption.

The document that he sent me a few days after our meeting was telling — not because it will actually be put in effect, but because it was produced by “youth” for the Serbian government. The document was created in the cooperation of the Ministry of Youth and Sport, KOMS, and NAPOR (National Association of the Practitioners of Youth Work). I treat it as an expression of subjects formed in the interstices of domestic policies and transnational institutions and norms that engage them. It was produced by youth who have become experts in EU speak, in applying for grants, in delineating goals, outcomes, and measures, and who, by learning to reproduce the language of this project world, also learned to reproduce its specific views and diagnoses.⁸¹

The process started in February 2015 with a consultation with the biggest employers in Serbia, 36 foreign and domestic companies, on issues relating to youth employment. The document is supposed to provide clear guidelines for all stakeholders on how to improve the dreadful situation in youth employment in Serbia. To quote the document itself: “The goal of the National Program for Youth Employment until 2020 is to contribute to the changes in the value system, help increasing the quality of the labour force, and help youth employment in Serbia.”⁸²

Here I want to contextualize this diagnosis of causes of youth unemployment and the specific solutions it imagines as ameliorating them. The document illustrates multiple things that are crucial in trying to understand how youth is experiencing a global effort at increasing their employment. First, I want to underscore the constructed character of images that reproduce the narratives of the deficient Balkan subject as lacking the skills and the will for employment. Second, I hope to show how these images focus on *individuals* but imply a much

⁸¹ To emphasise the documents “international” dimension, Marko highlighted that the deficiencies of youth listed in NAPZM, and the document itself, have been identified and created in a relation to international documents like Europe 2020 and Council of Europe’s strategies and recommendations. Moreover, KOMS’ funding is a combination of foreign donors and domestic government funding.

⁸² ‘Национални Програм Запошљавања Младих До 2020. Године [National Program for Youth Employment until 2020]’.

wider vision of an ideal form of political, economic, and cultural *order*. And lastly, I want to bring out the silences that underline this document, and my own fieldwork. Namely, I want to discuss youth that is *missing* from NFE activities I observed. This youth is not imagined to be empowered to pursue employment in elite CSOs nor to develop start-ups as projects. This youth is encouraged to follow a different market rationality into “dual education” and emigration.

i. National Program for Employment of Youth—an artefact of a vision

The program identifies four specific issues: 1) youth value systems and information about the needs of the labour market, 2) youth competencies needed to develop through trainings and non-formal education, 3) professional practical experiences and the development of the “dual education” system, and 4) creation of an atmosphere suitable for developing youth entrepreneurship.⁸³ These issues are then translated into five specific key outcomes, each further explained through specific goals, operational measures, and inter-sectorial initiatives. These are: 1) Youth in Serbia are informed and have positive values and attitudes towards work, 2) Youth in Serbia have applied knowledge, skills and key competencies, 3) Serbia has a national program of practical education [*praksa*], 4) Serbia has a growing number of young entrepreneurs and youth practice self-employment more, and 5) Serbia effectively implements educational policies in employment⁸⁴

In these five outcomes, the document offers specific visions of the ideal political, social, and economic arrangements in Serbia. The document imagines its *political* mission completed by a so called “delivery unit”—a concept popularized during the alleged cooperation between Tony Blair and Aleksandar Vučić, and translated into JUR [*jediniца usmjerena na rezultate —results oriented unit*].⁸⁵ Graph 2. in the document illustrates the delivery unit which starts with the leader in charge of the each of the four key outcomes (value change, knowledge and skills, practical experience [*praksa*], entrepreneurship, and the fifth key outcome is the delivery unit system itself). Between the leader and the evaluating team of the unit, there are four key stakeholders: foreign investor, the Ministry in charge of the particular outcome, NGO, and the private sector. The document does not explain its reliance on two corporate representatives, one in the form of a foreign investor and another in the

⁸³ ‘Национални Програм Запошљавања Младих До 2020. Године [National Program for Youth Employment until 2020]’, 8–9.

⁸⁴ ‘Национални Програм Запошљавања Младих До 2020. Године [National Program for Youth Employment until 2020]’, 13.

⁸⁵ For more information on this, see Angelovski, Marzouk, and Graham-Harisson, ‘Tony Blair Advising Serbian Government 16 Years After Bombing of Belgrade’.

form of the private sector, but I see them as echoing two different paradigms: one of economic progress through FDI which is so dominant in Serbia, and the public-private partnership which is so popular in the world of projects. Moreover, there is no explanation of the imagined cooperation between the stakeholders. But in its absence, we can use the creation of the document itself as indicative of the process.

The KOMS Working Group on Employment and Entrepreneurship, who Marko explained as being in charge of the creation of the document, was started as one of three KOMS working groups developed in a project application for the Ministry of Youth and Sport. Once the funding was acquired, the Ministry approached the group and tasked them with the creation of the NAPZM. The team started by surveying employers (only from the private sector) to find out more about their needs, and the document itself is a plan for how the government should satisfy those needs. This once again reiterates the re-positioning of civil society already discussed earlier in the chapter. Instead of civil society “limiting” government, they are working together. In this case, both are working to shape the population to respond to capital’s needs.

ii. Constructing the unemployed subject

These issues of changing values and nurturing entrepreneurial inclinations from an early age are clearly efforts at social engineering of well performing neoliberal subjects. Interestingly, the “changes in value system” that are mentioned first in the document, are never specified. However, we do get a glimpse into some of the issues of the “value system” in the section which describes the inputs of companies which were asked to comment on youth employment.

“When describing the situation in which they are currently and the challenges that they are facing, companies pointed out that major problems are found in the lack of preparation of youth to work in specific sectors, i.e. lack of practical experience, high expenses of employing youth, lack of specific professional profiles on the labour market (e.g. crafts or IT profiles—data mining, business intelligence), insufficient mastery of business skills, inadequate value system which brings with it in many senses unrealistic expectations of youth when it comes to employment, income levels, and work ethics.”⁸⁶

“Changing values” and adjusting the “unrealistic expectations” is listed as key outcome number one, but it remains unspecified beyond “positive attitudes towards

⁸⁶ ‘Национални Програм Запошљавања Младих До 2020. Године [National Program for Youth Employment until 2020]’, 8.

employment and work.” Measure 1.1.0. does call for research on current attitudes towards work and employment, but nowhere is it specified *what* those might entail, or *how* we might know what needs changing before actually conducting the research. More than critiquing the design of the policy paper, I want to point out the taken for granted character of the claim that it is the subject—its attitudes and values— to blame for its un-employability. This understanding is not limited to the policy paper. In discussions of unemployment that I witnessed, its causes were found either in the subjects’ unwillingness to work and dedicate themselves, or in the educational system that failed to provide the subjects with the needed skills. In the document, we see the subjects’ lack in multiple areas: lack of the “right attitude,” most likely meaning lack of commitment to hard work, lack of skills which are supposed to be acquired through volunteering, dual education, and NFE, and lack of entrepreneurial spirit which is supposed to be developed through media and formal and non-formal educational programs from age eight.

To understand the power and the common-sense status of these representations of the local we have to put them in conversation with other literatures. First, even though this narrative is part of a more global approach to unemployment that demonises youth,⁸⁷ in the Balkans it could not be accepted as a reality without an understanding of the Balkan or post-socialist subject as deficient. The narrative of “transition” from socialism to capitalism sees the failure of the subject to be anything less than a perfectly flexible vessel for human capital as a consequence of “old socialist ways” or “expecting the state to care for you.” As already mentioned in Part I of the thesis, post-socialist heritage in the form of the way we approach the Balkan post-socialist subject is crucial in designing *and* naturalising policies. Second, the narrative reflects a bigger picture of education subsumed to the needs of capital. As such, understanding the images of youth that are used in these projects and the ways that youth live their consequences is impossible without inquiring into the political economy which dictates what is expected of the labour market. And in the Balkans, the labour market is increasingly seen as a provider of cheap labour.

iii. Different visions for different subjects

Within youth policy captured in the NPZM, we see the quiet co-existence of radically different ways of developing youth for the labour market. One aims at creating the workforce ready to be harnessed by the private sector, and the other nurtures entrepreneurial spirit and self-employment. It is obvious that these two policies require very different educational

⁸⁷ Sukarieh and Tannock, *Youth Rising?*, 73.

systems. One is familiar from stories of empowerment and entrepreneurship. Education for young entrepreneurs as we usually understand them, as independent business owners, would entail an individual approach and topical width that would allow creativity to develop. The other one, however, is quite different and requires an alternative way of practicing one's market rationality. Here I want to briefly point out two of these alternatives that I encountered in conversations with youth and documents of NFE: training for migration and the "dual education" that is mentioned in the above document.

Training for migration as one of these "alternative ways" of practicing market rationality was brought to my attention by Jelena, a professional seminar-goer I got to know. She applied to everything and was able to explain, evaluate, and compare different workshops better than any ethnographer could ever dream of. In addition, Jelena was also explicitly "political:" she grew up protesting against Milošević and she was both knowledgeable about party politics and aware of its limitations in Serbia. When I met her, she was finishing her second MA and she was desperately looking for a job. She was pursuing multiple venues: her ideal placement would be in one of the human rights NGOs in Belgrade. Coming from a "second Serbia" family, Jelena saw herself as "the opposition" and she wanted to work on those issues that the Serbian government considers taboo.⁸⁸ The second venue she was pursuing was trying to start her own publishing house through a state project for helping young entrepreneurs open their own businesses. The selection was based on preparing a business plan, but most of the candidates, Jelena included, considered the business plan as a "form" to be filled out, rather than an explosion of creative juices as imagined in "start-up" narratives. Lastly, Jelena was trying to find a teaching position in one of many schools in Belgrade. Telling me about it, she emphasised that I cannot imagine how *many* schools there are in Belgrade. She only finds out about them when she sees the job listing: "You enter a building, and op, there's a school!"⁸⁹ She mentioned a particular school located on the fourth floor of a building in downtown Belgrade: on one side there are four classrooms of a medical nursing school (years one to four) and on the other side four classrooms for learning German (German level one to four). The match is obvious: as soon as they obtain their qualification, the nurses are ready for working in Germany.

⁸⁸ The First and Second Serbia refer to the cultural division between the former that designates nationalist, Orthodox, rural, and generally conservative outlook, and the latter that was formed as a liberal, cosmopolitan, and urban counterweight.

⁸⁹ Fieldwork journal, March 31, 2016.

What Jelena observed in this particular school is a small illustration of a much larger phenomena of economic migration from Serbia (and the region more generally), particularly strong in the health sector. This is recognized by development agencies. German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), for example, focuses on nurses in their “Triple Win” project for “sustainable recruitment of nurses” from Serbia, BiH, and Philippines. The project connects nurses in Serbia with employment agencies and placements in Germany, helps them in preparatory courses while in Serbia, and facilitates integration upon arrival. The triple win relates to the following: “1) pressure is eased on labour markets in the countries of origin, 2) migrants’ remittances provide a developmental stimulus in their countries of origin, 3) the shortage of nurses in Germany is alleviated.”⁹⁰

While it is obvious how Germany and the Serbian state win in this case, it is less obvious how the actual nurses win. In my conversations with youth in Serbia, opportunities like this—where you would go abroad to a “well-functioning” country, get a “real” job, and actually get paid for the work done—are celebrated as a break from the “lack of opportunities” in Serbia. Yet, in those same conversations, none of these people actually *wanted* to live abroad. Given the choice, they would much prefer getting a real job and getting paid in Serbia.

Most importantly, while the governmental practices that encourage and facilitate migration are obvious—both in the documents and in observations like that retold by Jelena—there are preconditions for migration that cannot be captured in those practices. Namely, as Beate Jahn observed in her critique of the policies seeking to ameliorate inequality through free movement, there has to be *inequality* that motivates the migration in the first place. Moreover, the migrant herself has to be imagined as a subject without social and political ties, able to “freely” pursue the market rationality that leads to relocation.⁹¹ Migration can be imagined as a “triple win” only if subjects are imagined “free” of social ties. It is these structures and processes that go *beyond* governmentality that I will come back to in Chapter 6.

Another less exciting way of practicing market rationality comes in the form of dual education. The “dual education” system or “vocational education” has long been debated as a key reform strategy for secondary education in Serbia. The reform is led by the Serbian

⁹⁰ ‘Sustainable Recruitment of Nurses (Triple Win)’.

⁹¹ Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism*, 125. For a more extended take on migration, see Cheah, ‘Biopower and the New International Division of Reproductive Labor’.

Chamber of Commerce, and it is greatly helped by GIZ, The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), KulturKontakt Austria, and SwissContact.⁹² Accordingly, German, Austrian and Swiss policies are to be emulated. Besides technical support, these agencies also provide public platforms that are supposed to promote the idea in the public. For example, the centre right German political foundation Konrad Adenauer Stiftung published a brochure on dual education in *Danas*, the main oppositional daily.⁹³ In 2016, two conferences were organised in cooperation with Swiss and German experts, and the project is supported by the then-Prime Minister Vučić.⁹⁴

The supposed benefits of dual education are diverse. First, the students benefit from the ability to earn money by spending a part of their school week at work. By doing this, they gain skills that not only make them generally more employable, but actually provide an opportunity for continued employment in the same company. The benefits, however, go well beyond personal gain to contribute to Serbian development in general. At an event organised in cooperation of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Swiss Embassy, Vučić explained how the dual education model is crucial for a whole range of “most important questions that we [Serbians] have to best answer to”—“employment, GDP growth, life standard, European integration.”⁹⁵ The impact on employment is obvious, but it has to be emphasised that the discussion of GDP is not limited to growth from the increased employment: dual education is also used for attracting foreign investors. While it is never explicitly stated that it provides cheap labour, the understanding that dual education provides *skilled* labour and incentive for investors is widespread. Advocates of dual education present it as a key element in the negotiations that facilitate the arrival of FDI in Serbia, while the opponents condemn it as another way of favouring big capital at the expense of the citizens.

It is undeniable that nurses who migrate to Germany and students who are employed by companies that participated in their secondary education are better off than being unemployed. But the narrative is still worth unpacking. More than relying on different

⁹² See more on the donor committee website: Zürich, ‘Donor Committee for Dual Vocational Education and Training’.

⁹³ The brochure is available at:

http://serbien.ahk.de/fileadmin/ahk_serbien/Berufsbildung/Konrad_Adenauer_flyer/KAS_dualno_obrazovanje-nemacki_sistem.pdf

⁹⁴ More details on the news from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia ‘Raste Interesovanje Srpskih Kompanija Za Dualno Obrazovanje [Growing Interest of Serbian Companies for Dual Education]’.

⁹⁵ ‘Dualno Obrazovanje Prioritet Vlade i Privrede [Dual Education Is a Priority for the Government and the Economy]’.

approaches within the same project of the entrepreneurial self, this image relies on inequality already present in Serbia and increasing at a steady rate since the beginning of the restoration of capitalism. And with civil society helping to shape the population according to the market's needs, we see most clearly Foucault's understanding of civil society as a solution to the problem of managing subjects of state sovereignty in a certain territory not as subjects of rights, but as economic subjects.⁹⁶ This management implies macro adjustments such as a system for vocational training responsive to the needs of FDI, but also adjustments in the realm of subjectivity.

Dual education is an *educational* policy targeting youth, but its vision is all encompassing. It dictates a new relationship between the state that is supposed to provide the labour for the capital, and the civil society that is supposed to be the supportive link in this mechanism (as it has been in the debate so far). Moreover, it directly imagines teachers and unions as problems to be resolved. A document developed by GIZ “anticipates resistance to change” and predicts two possible sources of contention: 1) those who are at risk at losing “influence, power or resources” (teacher unions, existing policy experts), and 2) those who “do not find themselves prepared or willing to assume new responsibilities” (for example, businesses who do not wish to develop secondary education plans).⁹⁷ In this “resistance,” there are two obvious purposes. First, and once again, any kind of political discussion on distribution of resources that might be started by unions is framed as a nuisance, rather than a constitutive part of politics. And second, while this vision is presented as universal, the inability to adapt is once again particularised: the “problem” becomes only those who lack the will and the skills to adapt to change.

A part of this governmentality is an understanding of life that explains the difference between a young adult in vocational training and a young owner of a start-up business as different expressions of the *same* entrepreneurial spirit: both make market calculations based on their situations and competitively strive for the best *possible* option. Sometimes this is economic migration, sometimes accepting work below basic labour standards, and sometimes it is doing internships while getting a university degree to make oneself the best valued human capital. But because they are all driven by the *same* entrepreneurial drive, we see as a result the *normalisation* of economic inequality that expresses itself both culturally

⁹⁶ See Lecture 13 in Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

⁹⁷ Euler, ‘Dual Vocational Education’, 56.

and politically. For this normalisation to work, human life as an enterprise has to become a social and cultural norm.

The youth that are supposed to get work in factories opened through FDI or by migrating abroad are not supposed to compete with the youth populating the many business-incubators in Belgrade. Their entrepreneurship does not rely on being creative, but on knowing their limits so they can make sure to get the most *within* them. They are expected to accept what they can get, get over their old unreasonable socialist demands of labour rights, and perform the tasks needed. A major restriction of this research is that this youth does not attend NFE activities and therefore I had little contact with them.⁹⁸ Yet their absence is telling in itself—it is naturalised by two images of successful youth. One is a successful owner of a start-up and the other a docile factory worker. This image pointedly shows that governmentalisation, despite its apparent universalizing tendencies, depends on and works through differentiation and unevenness, sometimes between two young adult subjectivities, and sometimes between countries in the core and the periphery. I will discuss this further in Chapter 6.

V Resistance

The added value of an ethnographic approach to governmentality is the recovery of the messy, incomplete, and contested aspects of governmental practices—what Sukarieh, in another investigation of a NFE workshop in Jordan, termed as “recognis[ing] the importance of local agency, resistance, and contestation in processes of neoliberal subject creations.”⁹⁹ While the chapter so far has emphasised how practices of NFE have effects that far surpass creating empowered young citizens, this section will focus more on the contestation that surrounds those processes. But before moving on to some of these encounters, it is necessary to qualify the label of “resistance” that I attach to these people and events—especially because the focus on resistance is often celebrated as a panacea for liberal peace in a fashion similar to the valorisation of the local that Chapter 1 discussed.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ This is also another limit of ethnography understood as “thick description”—sometimes it is that was *missing* and therefore cannot be described that matters for our analysis. I will come back to this in the Conclusion.

⁹⁹ Sukarieh, ‘On Class, Culture, and the Creation of the Neoliberal Subject’, 1201.

¹⁰⁰ de Heredia, ‘Escaping Statebuilding’; Death, ‘Counter-Conducts as a Mode of Resistance’; de Heredia, ‘Resistances and Challenges to Liberal Peace Processes’; Kappler and Richmond, ‘Peacebuilding and Culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina Resistance or Emancipation?’; MacGinty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance*; Richmond, ‘Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace’; Richmond, ‘Critical Agency, Resistance and a Post-Colonial Civil Society’; Richmond, ‘A Pedagogy of Peacebuilding’; Zanotti, ‘Normalizing Democracy and Human Rights’.

Drawing especially on Foucault's work, liberal peace critics like Richmond have re-conceptualised resistance as "critical agency" capable of countering IR's usual view of resistance as cemented in a position of "inferiority, irrelevance, illiberalism, spoiling or injustice."¹⁰¹ Coming from a different angle, anti-colonial critique elaborated by Sabaratnam sees in resistance the local subjecthood that is usually silenced in critiques of liberal peace—resistance thus again provides an opportunity to learn from the targets of intervention and their political analysis.¹⁰² While building onto both of these approaches, my engagement with these practices and narratives is different. I do not approach them with the goal of finding the local "grassroot," neither by unquestioningly embracing the on-the-ground political analyses that I will show are more problematic. I turn to resistance in order to make better sense of how subjects position themselves within the narratives of progress and government.

Foucault famously argued that "where there is power, there is resistance." But he also added that "this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."¹⁰³ One of the most important contributions of governmentality studies to considerations of power and its varied effects is the impossibility of a clear delineation between power and that which resists it. While some read this as pessimism inscribed in Foucault's thinking, my own approach is more sanguine.¹⁰⁴ Rather than looking for the "authentic" local that might stand outside and resist global narratives that I examine, I chose to look at all subjectivities as always relational and made in complex matrices of power. Accepting this as a starting point means that resistance being shaped by the power it is supposed to challenge does not disqualify it. It is still a transgression that can both change political life and inform our studies of it. Hence, I use the label resistance "lightly"—as an important diagnostic of both power and its effects, but without inscribing in it inherently revolutionary potential. Thus, this discussion of people and narratives that contest practices of neoliberal governmentality avoids having to decide whether the people I have spoken to have "bought into" or are "resisting" neoliberalism. I stay away from defining who has managed to circumvent, and who has fallen prey to neoliberalism. However, the fact remains that the planet is not populated by homogenous economic subjects. And because of this, understanding the local experience of global governmentality necessitates highlighting practices that contest and transform it.

¹⁰¹ Richmond, 'Critical Agency, Resistance and a Post-Colonial Civil Society', 426.

¹⁰² Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*.

¹⁰³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, 95.

¹⁰⁴ For a clear discussion of this point, see McNay, 'Self as Enterprise'.

i. Alternative visions of governing

The most obvious form of resistance I encountered is providing visions of progress that are in direct opposition to those offered by the international community and often the Serbian state. Even though the “dual education” policy is seemingly built on a broad collation—supported by business and government, the state and international agencies, and even referenced to the World Bank as Vučić has done in the above quoted speech—there are also alternative visions that see the policy as exploitative and damaging. An article by Saša Dragojlo published on the portal *Bilten* summarises the critique. The dual education policy exploits both the children who are not adequately paid for their work and the state which subsidizes the program. In doing so, it reproduces class differences because children from lower class families will be trapped by an education that provides skills specific to employers who thus increase their power. Moreover, this education precludes any kind of *political* education that might happen in more traditional education.¹⁰⁵ The article points to a different, leftist, conception of citizenship, democracy and development. However, I do not cite it here as only a well-written narrative, but also because the portal on which it is published, *Bilten* is itself a product of a transnational “educational project.”

The *Bilten* project is funded by a leftist German Political Foundation that funds many “new left” social movements in the region. It cooperates closely with *Mašina*, a similar website in Serbia. It is precisely this broad coalition of groups (most of them under the joint name of the Levi samit Srbije—Left summit of Serbia) that attended the public consultations of the Draft of the Law on Dual Education with posters like “a child is not a commodity” and “children are not cheap labour.”¹⁰⁶ I was in touch with these groups both through inquiring into *Mašina*—an educational project whose now famous portal is actually an *output* of its educational activities—and through attending numerous lectures in Belgrade around broadly leftist and feminist topics. Many explicitly political events I attended that were organised by leftist groups in Belgrade were directly funded by foreign political institutions: at the beginning of the lecture, we would all “sign in” on the sheets that were used for proving the “impact” of events to their donors.

While the design and competition around these projects were definitely a governmental practice meant to depoliticise, it seems that the “real goal” of the projects was re-politicisation through educational activities. And while I was in Belgrade it seemed like it

¹⁰⁵ Dragojlo, ‘Dualno Obrazovanje Kao Subvencionisanje Investitora [Dual Education as Subsidising Investors]’.

¹⁰⁶ Insajder, ‘O dualnom obrazovanju [On Dual Education]’.

was happening everywhere. These actors used NFE and other interventions to advocate for a different vision of political life—one that conceptualised the state, the citizen, and society in ways that differ from the dominant operative narratives of funding bodies. The sentiment was best captured in an interview with Bojan, a Serbian employee of a German political foundation’s Belgrade office. As I explained my interest in the organisation’s activities and their place in Serbia’s socio-political landscape, Bojan was very clear that his foundation—and the people who they funded and employed—is *not* a part of civil society in Serbia. This was a direct confrontation to both their registered status in Serbia and their main activity of helping NGOs in the region. Bojan explained that the current vision of civil society in Serbia is indubitably *apolitical* as it worked through concepts like advocacy, democracy, and rule of law. In Bojan’s narrative, CS donors in Serbia did not only move away from grassroots political organising, but they actually *pacify* the organisations they fund and support. And his foundation is different:

“Our way of working leaves us the option to avoid pacifying these groups; they keep something like their own politics and their own political identity. And they really talk, they really somehow enact politics [*zaista nekako sprovode politiku*] in different ways close to them.”¹⁰⁷

These alternative visions did not come just from the progressive leftists from Belgrade. In the semester course for right wing political youth that I attended, one of the lectures was on fiscal politics. The topic was expectedly unpopular: economics are difficult to comprehend for people who did not study them, and the participants found it hard to relate to the matters that were discussed. In demonstrating the economism that we were supposed to be taught that day (and generally in the course), the speaker used an example of a “useless” highway that was built from Čačak, a small town in southern Serbia, and the Adriatic coast in Montenegro. The speaker used it as a case of a bad investment: there is not enough industry transported in the region to warrant the cost of building a highway.

This is where the discussion got more heated. A young man from southern Serbia raised his hand to argue against dismissing the highway as useless: the region is extremely isolated, and without the highway and a better connection to Serbia they cannot even hope to ever develop an industry that would use such a highway. The speaker stood their ground, and another young woman joined the discussion. She started by introducing herself as a

¹⁰⁷ Interview, April 13, 2016.

“non-economist,” someone who “runs away from numbers all her life.” She said that these kinds of investments cannot be looked at just “economically,” but as something for the “good of the town or the village” [*dobrobit za grad ili selo*]—*cost-benefit* [used in English] analysis is not enough, something needs to be done for citizens for the common good [*opće dobro*], and not just for political points [*političke poene*]. The “common good” was not surprising—this was a course for parties that very much rely on ideas of the nationhood and the “common good” it creates. However, the interesting part of the course is that the “right” in Serbia also includes the neoliberal and libertarian right. This particular view was represented by three participants from a technocratic libertarian party.

Vlado, a participant that came as a representative of this technocratic party, did not agree: such considerations are futile, anything besides a pure cost-benefit analysis ends up with each “pulling to their own village [*svako samo vuče na svoje selo*]”. Here, we see the aforementioned “purification.” Economism is not only imagined as neoliberal progress, but also as a specific cure to the corruption of “everyone trying to work only for their own village.” Admittedly, it might not be wrong to want to develop one’s home, but in these stories these aspirations are not just benevolent efforts at benefiting specific communities, but calculated moves to stay in power by “buying” votes with symbolic gestures.

The challenges to this economism were a particular form of resistance. In the case of this particular course, it was resistance framed around nationalist and often populist demands. While explicitly providing for youth associated with centre and moderate right parties, the composition of the course I attended itself demonstrated the futility of such readings of politics in Serbia. To ask “what people this project attracts” like in the introduction to the chapter, inevitably involves asking what it means to be “right wing” in Serbia today. My observations were similar to those of Hemment who observed the Nashi activists in a Russian university. They see “themselves as civic warriors, fierce and righteous individuals who, in a corrective to the disparaged politics as usual, engage[d] in forms of direct action to educate an ill-informed, apathetic public.”¹⁰⁸ Many people I spoke to saw themselves as primarily fighting the “good fight.” Even though they subscribed to extreme party lines around Kosovo, LGBT+ rights, and gender, their everyday activism related to employment, local community issues, and either vehemently supporting or opposing the ruling party.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Hemment, *Youth Politics in Putin’s Russia*, 93.

¹⁰⁹ The course’s definition of right wing included both the ruling party and several of its right wing oppositional parties.

The right-wing orientation of the course was reflected in the speakers. We had a lecture literally on ordo-liberalism using the same thinkers that Foucault teases apart in his lectures. We were told that any effort at re-distribution is “buying votes.” We were taught that only private property protects: buffalos are extinct because no one owned them, while privately owned cows are doing well.¹¹⁰ When encountering these issues abstractly, the students were responsive: technocracy meant facing the corruption that is obviously hurting the country. However, when faced with more practical examples of economism, like in the example above, the students rebelled by invoking the good of the community and the nation. Yet, unlike Sukarieh’s experience in Jordan where *class* was used to challenge neoliberal narratives, here I saw *nationalism* as an alternative that pays more attention to the common good.¹¹¹

The two narratives mixed in complex ways. One of the most eagerly awaited speakers was a German politician whose visit was a special occasion: it was attended by the representative of the foundation that funds the course, and the project manager was visibly nervous—used to dealing with the youth attending the course, she was now performing for the people funding her employment. The politician was there to speak about the German model of social market economy. The lecture presented the basic tenets of the model also known as Rhine capitalism and put them in conversations on global economic and political challenges. Yet, as soon as the Q&A was open, a very different topic emerged. The students prepared for this visit and knew that he had left politics in 2010 and has since become a successful businessman and the designer of one of the most famous FDI projects in Serbia.¹¹²

The Q&A immediately opened with questions about investments in Serbia: how did he decide to come? Why? What place does Serbia have in the bigger business plans? The politician-turned-investor explained the choice to come to Serbia by comparing it to two other options: one being in Southeast Asia and the other in Bulgaria. Southeast Asia proved inferior because it had higher transport costs due to distance and less trained workforce. Bulgaria, on the other hand, was deemed politically less stable and therefore less able to

¹¹⁰ Fieldwork journal, March 1, 2016. Paradoxically, the illustrative example also points to the welfare (or lack thereof) of cows in industrial farming and highlights the suffering that is occluded by a focus on profit.

¹¹¹ Sukarieh, ‘On Class, Culture, and the Creation of the Neoliberal Subject’.

¹¹² The investment that opened for business in 2013 and expanded ever since was controversial. It was presented as the revival of the never-forgotten ruined Serbian auto-industry, and at the same time heavily criticized along with other government efforts to subsidize FDI. With each employment that paid around 200EUR in salaries subsidized with thousands of euros, many were (and still are) asking what the financial sense is? For more data on these subsidies, see the investigative project Istinomer, ‘We Did Not Give 10.000 Euros per Employee [Nismo Davali 10.000 Evra Po Radnom Mestu]’.

provide state support for procuring licenses (for example, for gas emissions). In this narrative, Serbia emerged as the winner of the race to the bottom: labour was cheap but qualified, the state was strong enough to both subsidise financially and “move” legislation and licenses, and it was close enough to the European market. Hearing it put this simply, I braced for the expected storm: while the aspiring technocrats in the audience might accept this economism, the nationalists will surely intervene!

I was very wrong. Even though there were many hands in the air after this explanation, the students did not aim to challenge this narrative, but to appropriate it: is there a chance for an investment in a different region? What exactly would they need to consider opening more factories elsewhere? Do they know that there are free trade zones opening around the country? Instead of condemning exploitation, the youth that sat beside me saw it as the only opportunity for development and *invited* it.

This peculiar mix of neoliberal narratives and nationalist contestation, and the motley results of their encounters, become especially important in many debates around “the local” and “the local-local.” In these debates, radical nationalism and rejection of both economic and social progressiveness is something that is read as “authentic.” My observations, on the other hand, show that neoliberalism can be embraced along with nationalism, and even rejected on almost the same grounds. Instead of seeing the neoliberal international intervention in *conflict* with local nationalism, making sense of the observations in the course requires seeing both the intervention and nationalism changing *together* in what Tamara Vukov has referred to as “the dance of neoliberalism and nationalism.”¹¹³ They stop working with opposing logics—both in the state level, and on the subject level and invite us to reconsider how we conceptualise power and its subjects—a topic that will be discussed in Part III of the thesis.

ii. Resisting with money

A number of people that I met were completely aware of the neoliberal agenda of donors, but they were determined to politicise the funds and use them for their own programmes. One example was a young man I met in Novi Sad who was trying to apply for an Erasmus+ project to support an existing initiative in which they had young adults with “social difficulties” (very often criminal convictions) work in their summer camps and help build agricultural and communal alternative living spaces. They were experienced in getting EU funds, but as we learned from working on Marco’s application during the “develop your

¹¹³ Vukov, ‘Seven Theses’, 170.

own idea” session at the training in Novi Sad, many of these things were a matter of “translation” of *political* goals to the neutral and *apolitical* “project speak” of the EU. For example, “coming closer to nature” becomes “techniques for sustainable and resource efficient living,” and “horizontal decision making” becomes “active citizenship and participation from an early stage.”¹¹⁴ Thus, aims to re-negotiate the relationship with the living environment gets framed as “efficiency” and experiments in radical democracy get reduced to “participation” once again.¹¹⁵

Resistance to the current practices of project politics was also practiced in foundations when choosing how to support the organisations they decided to support. Bojan (from the political foundation discussed above) was aware of the difficulties of an activist life, and therefore explicitly sought to provide an at least somewhat steady income to people the Foundation worked with. They should not worry about paying rent, filling out form after form, or having another job that would cover their living expense — activism should be their job and the Foundation’s funds are used for the purpose. As such, the use of funds steps outside of the market rationality of calls, competitions, and transparency. In his narrative, Bojan was clear that it is precisely this stepping out that places his organisation *outside* civil society in Serbia. Civil society here was presented at the same time *apolitical* by serving as a platform for elite class formation, and as a very *political* submission to narratives of liberalism and EU accession. This organisation refused both.

In all of these contestations, we see what Vorbrugg terms “the copresence, entanglements, and mixings of political and antipolitical moments and rationalities.”¹¹⁶ Practices of NGO funding and NFE that are usually understood as depoliticising are re-appropriated and put to work for explicitly political goals. Funds are diverted and used for both personal gains, and for political and social goals that cannot be confined within the visions of the donors. In this process, alternative visions of what it means to act as a state, civil society, and citizen are forwarded.

Conclusions

This chapter explored how local youth experiences practices of non-formal education that seek to promote peace, development, and democracy by building citizens capable and willing to navigate liberal democratic societies. Using observations from NFE, the chapter

¹¹⁴ Fieldwork journal, January 24, 2016.

¹¹⁵ Fieldwork journal, January 26, 2016.

¹¹⁶ Vorbrugg, ‘Governing through Civil Society?’, 141.

discussed larger fields of civil society and unemployment that defined how youth is engaged by these projects. In addressing issues identified in Chapter 1—that of locating political agency among the *targets* of intervention and contextualising this agency within local *and* international contexts—the chapter did not only address these issues, but it also complicated them in multiple ways.

In trying to locate *the* “local experience,” the chapter uncovered a *multiplicity* of subjects: the democracy guerrillas that told me stories of bravery and heroism from the late 1990s, the political children that suddenly had to learn the ways of politics and democracy, the unemployed youth, and the resisters who are not far away—my contemporaries who are navigating the aftermath of all these projects and who are varyingly engaged or abandoned by current donors and agencies. This demonstrates the theoretical arguments presented in Chapter 1: ideas about local subjectivity, with all of their ambiguity and malleability, are intimately connected to practices of government.

The ways that these experiences were connected to international intervention is a far wider *and* a much messier process than a straightforward subjectivation of the *homo oeconomicus*. Here, I would like to raise four distinct points. First, intervention’s effect far surpasses the creation of the individual subject and goes on to reshape the concepts of state, civil society, and the citizen. Civil society grew closer to both the state and international donors, the state itself became directly engaged in project politics, and the citizenship was defined as enacted firmly within the limits imposed by this translation. The limits were set by ideals of economism and proceduralism, and the result is projectivized politics.

The wider effect of project politics was felt in an issue seemingly removed from discussions of peace and democracy—youth unemployment. As I watched how my interlocutors navigate the acute unemployment they find themselves in, it became obvious that NFE is part of a wider system that seeks to govern unemployment. This programme depends on the promotion of “individualistic and moralistic solutions, rather than [state] intervention into the labour market” and is accompanied “by a strong attempt to tie the education system firmly to the fluctuating need of industry and hence capital.”¹¹⁷

Second, these practices, although very obviously reflecting ideals of global neoliberalism, are not ahistorical or groundless. The origins of this programme are unmistakably global neoliberal ideals. These neoliberal dreams, however, are rooted in the enduring image of culturally, politically, and economically deficient Balkan subject. Since

¹¹⁷ Horne, ‘Continuity and Change’, 24; cited in Sukarieh and Tannock, *Youth Rising?*, 59.

Yugoslavia, NFE was used to create “citizens.” However, while the citizenship in Yugoslavia was structured by the image of “brotherhood and unity,” today it revolves around self-enterprise and competition.

Moreover, these practices build onto specific images of what subjects are and how they should be transformed. In her analysis of “participation,” Greenberg goes beyond analysing it as a just a neoliberal technique and points out that none of its critics actively engage with subjective underpinnings of these processes. She argues that “such analyses tend to elide what is compelling to local actors about becoming self-managing, self-regulating subjects.”¹¹⁸ To understand the compelling power and the effects of these solutions it is necessary to put them in context with the discussions on Balkanism that helps us understand why the images of local subjects as unwilling and unable to find employment can so easily be rationalised as the truth. Any invocation of structuralism is associated with backward socialist thinking, any demand interpreted as socialist entitlement. Proceduralism is supposed to serve as “purification” and eliminate (post)socialist corruption.¹¹⁹ Economism is supposed to replace the anti-market reliance on state welfare and teach people that they can make it on their own if they navigate the market well. And professionalization aims at re-socializing the corrupt and lazy to embrace “European values.” While not denying the very real problems in Serbia, it is important to underline the particularism innate to explanations which do not question processes, but only their local implementation. This does not only necessarily leave bigger problems and more effective solutions out of sight, but it also productively prescribes other ways of thinking and living. Local agency here emerges as pathology and its only relationship to the international is its stubborn retardation of the global march to progress. The important thing to note, however, is the productive power of these images as they inspire and legitimize governmental practices and programs.

Third, the chapter also contested the supposedly straightforward nature of these programs of government that seek to affect a purportedly universal subject. While their most obvious manifestation might be in practices that seek to govern through freedom—the making of human capital and man-enterprises—in reality they depend both on the drawing of lines between those meant to be empowered and those contained, and on naturalising

¹¹⁸ Greenberg, *After the Revolution*, 87. She raises a similar point in her discussion of “apathy” by emphasising that for many youth in former Yugoslavia, apathy is a way of distancing oneself from politics that are seen as to have led to war and destruction. Greenberg, ‘There’s Nothing Anyone Can Do about It’.

¹¹⁹ I borrow the idea of purification of politics through procedures from Greenberg, *After the Revolution*, 151.

those lines. In his study of a German political foundation's activities in Ukraine, Vorbrugg argues that the "universalizing gestures" that these foundations rely on, necessarily universalize the *exclusions* inscribed in them.¹²⁰ I observed similar line drawing in visions of government like the one presented in the NPZM document.

NPZM is inscribed with a particular bifurcation of youth and their assigned future development. How *much* human capital needs to develop in a person is not a universal standard. While I encountered those trained to be future leaders and taught to invest in themselves, the other subjects were youth training to migrate and those going through vocational education under the supervision of the state and foreign investors. By pointing to these subjects, which are precisely the people who are *not* imagined in stories of civil society empowerment and CV building, the chapter exposes the limits of methodological and analytical frameworks. These disruptions will form the basis of the discussion in Chapter 6.

And fourth, these practices are engaged, contested, and at times fuel the politics that they are supposed to eradicate. The added value of an ethnographic approach here is precisely in problematising the clear-cut reading of governmentality that would be produced from focusing only on the intent of governing. In a similar project on an NFE activity in Jordan, Sukarieh invokes Ferguson to highlight the "complex relation between the intentionality of planning and the strategic intelligibility of outcomes."¹²¹ It is this intelligibility that confronts us when trying to study the effects of interventions from the experiences of its targets. The prescribed meritocracy and individualism resulted in civil society as an elite formation and network of professionals. Instead of posing a limit to government, its role became employment and self-interest. On the other hand, the practices that were meant to depoliticise and cement the limits of political thought and action, were contested by similar international donors and identical NFE practices. Instead of firmly drawn lines between the political and anti-political, we saw people practicing politics in whatever ways accessible and we saw practices of government inspiring, rather than eliminating political contestation.

In conclusion, by trying to study local experience and its various connection to international power, the chapter presented a less conclusive, yet a far richer story than one of depoliticisation. At one of the Erasmus+ events I attended, we were encouraged to use the term "youth with fewer opportunities." By avoiding any allusion to class, race, gender,

¹²⁰ Vorbrugg, 'Governing through Civil Society?', 139, 149–50.

¹²¹ Sukarieh, 'On Class, Culture, and the Creation of the Neoliberal Subject', 1203.

sexuality, or ethnicity, the term would allow us to help “those in need” without questioning the systemic issues that created those needs. A young man from Greece wondered out loud:

“We all agree that we use this term only in writing projects with the EU, but aren’t we all today youth with fewer opportunities? Fewer than our parents, fewer than our peers in Western Europe, and fewer than we had when we were born...”¹²²

The statement makes obvious that the youth I encountered, and the youth constantly targeted by neoliberal practices of NFE, is neither a passive product of global neoliberalism nor the authentic local separated from global flows. They are political subjects, aware of their positionality within their communities, the state, Europe, and the world. Learning from them does not mean only “understanding” them better, but questioning ways we think about politics and society that they make. It also shows that, perhaps surprisingly, while some aspects of intervention work to contain alternatives to neoliberalism, others work to support them. Thus the reading of neoliberal intervention as depoliticising—presented in the Introduction and Chapter 1 in works of Brown, Dardot and Laval, and McNay—is incomplete. This interpretation fails to grasp the myriad of ways in which the people I met *practice* politics. Politics that are grounded in ideas of what a Balkan subject is, but politics that are never considered just *local*. I will pursue this redefinition in Chapter 6. But before stepping outside of these fields of experience to ask what we might learn from them, we will inquire into a new site away from NFE activities of youth: that of agricultural governance.

¹²² Fieldwork journal, January 26, 2016.

Chapter 5

Governing Agriculture: Between accession and investment

Agriculture is usually relegated to development studies—research that concerns peasants, technological innovation, and community politics. It is not the first thing that comes to our mind when thinking about intervention—the high state politics of statebuilding and peacebuilding rarely pay attention to what goes on in the fields where food is grown. Yet there are very stable ideals of *how* agriculture should be governed, and *who* should be the subjects of that government. This ideal is very much a part of the greater vision of what good political life is. In this chapter, in lieu of a liberal peace package, we are presented with a modern agriculture package that is nevertheless underpinned by similar values of entrepreneurship, market competition, “the right” form of government, and specific subjectivities.

As such, agriculture becomes a field in which we can examine (international) politics generally, and politics of intervention more specifically. In the study of politics generally, agriculture already serves as the basis of insightful and varied studies. William Biebuyck, for example, interprets the EU through food supply as a “a formative space in the creating and exercise of centralized governing authority in Western Europe.”¹ He examines the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and other instances of agricultural government alongside more commonly discussed phenomena such as war and market integration as crucial for the emergence of EU as we know it today. Outside Europe, agriculture was and still is the target of many development practices. Agriculture, perhaps unsurprisingly, serves as a powerful illustration of the “postcolonial” condition that Akhil Gupta examines in his detailed book on agriculture and the making of modern India.² In his analysis, “technologies of food production” are intimately intertwined with global capitalism and discourses of development—the basis of understanding of postcoloniality for rural people in India.³ A different examination of globalisation comes from treating agriculture as a field of

¹ Biebuyck, ‘Food Supply and Government’, 2.

² Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments*.

³ Gupta, 338.

governance. In an edited volume, Vaughan Higgins and Geoffrey Lawrence bring to fore the many ways that the government of food is becoming transversal and is moving onto non-state actors that might initially be perceived as removed from the political realm.⁴ Within Serbia, Andre Thiemann used a small agricultural village as a setting in which he examines broader state relations in transitional Serbia.⁵ In the only monograph that deals with the political implications of agriculture in Serbia, Slobodan Naumović used three agricultural case studies to examine wider processes of Europeanisation.⁶ All of these examples demonstrate that agriculture is crucial for understanding concepts like the state, the market, different forms of power, and the relations between them. These are the concepts through which interventions work and that make and are made by people experiencing them.

Within intervention scholarship, scholars like Gearoid Millar, Andreas Hirblinger, and Meera Sabaratnam have started exploring agriculture as one dimension of the liberal intervention machine. In a series of articles, Millar examines a particular land grab in Sierra Leone as a “direct embodiment of the liberal peace paradigm” and uses it to bring to the fore the economic dimension of liberal peace—a belief that marketization leads to peace.⁷ Hirblinger, on the other hand, approaches the post-peace agreement in South Sudan through the “tri-partite relationship between political subjectivity, government and land” that profoundly shapes both conflict and post-conflict dynamics in the country.⁸ Sabaratnam, in her study of Mozambique, focuses on a different type of intervention in agriculture. She examines practices like microfinance projects, efforts to facilitate a move away from (semi-)subsistence farming and towards “producing for the market,” and reforms aimed at building the Ministry of Agriculture. Starting from the perspective of the peasantry which is supposed to be the beneficiary of these projects, she uses agriculture to uncover wider characteristics of liberal peace interventions—they are “largely indifferent, irresponsible or fragile.”⁹

Similarly, this chapter takes agriculture as a field in which we can examine the experiences of “being governed.” The following pages capture many of the above themes. I examine the reforms and statebuilding efforts in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and

⁴ Higgins and Lawrence, *Agricultural Governance*.

⁵ Thiemann, ‘State Relations’; Thiemann, ‘Shrinking Capitalism, “Milky Ways”, and the Moral Appreciation of Serbia’s “Living Village”’; Thiemann, ‘The Moral Appreciation of Social Security’.

⁶ Naumović, *Fields of Paradox*.

⁷ See also Millar, ‘Local Experiences of Liberal Peace’, 569; Millar, “‘We Have No Voice for That’”; Millar, ‘Knowledge and Control in the Contemporary Land Rush’.

⁸ Hirblinger, ‘Land, Political Subjectivity and Conflict in Post-CPA Southern Sudan’.

⁹ Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*, 84 See the whole Chapter Five for more on intervention in the agricultural sector.

Water Economy¹⁰ (and the people that make it) and I inquire how the focus on nurturing market relations unfolds in different dimensions of agriculture. The chapter proceeds in five parts. The first part of the chapter will offer a short historical overview of agricultural government in Serbia to provide historical context, and to point to legacies that are still present in policies today.

The second part will define intervention as EU accession and bring to the fore the subject-making implied in EU practices. However, more than just “employing” governmentality to uncover these processes, this part will use its ethnographic orientation to highlight aspects of local experience that would stay hidden in a focus on EU practices—things like brain drain, local class stratification, and the political economy of civil society. Without these things, the account of the effects of EU practices remains under-explored.

The third part of the chapter will more specifically employ the thesis’ change of vantage point to that of those who are supposed to benefit from interventions. By following the concerns of my interlocutors, instead of intervention’s official aims, it will bring out the field of agricultural land use—a field which is formative of any agricultural policy, but which is *absent* from EU negotiations. The third section will dig deeper into land policy and follow Foucault’s advice to start analysing power from contestation. It will focus on a particular form of resistance against changes in land policy to draw out narratives and concepts that people use to orient themselves and their experiences of the transformation of agriculture in Serbia.

The fourth part will shortly summarize how these issues that emerge from the chapter’s empirical practice reflect on the project of engaging experiences of those being intervened upon.

Finally, the conclusion will shortly review how the chapter speaks to the problem of studying intervention from the eyes of those experiencing it. However, more than restating the work done in the thesis so far, it will draw out specific tensions that emerged and that will be pursued further in Chapter 6.

¹⁰ Here I focus on a Ministry that changed its name during the writing of the thesis. During my fieldwork, it was still The Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection. With the EU requirements stating the separation of those two bodies, the expected change came after the 2017 election and the Ministry is now Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy. To avoid confusion, I shorten this to “the Ministry” from now on. If I am talking about another Ministry, it will be specified.

I Agriculture as a political and ideological project through history

As noted above, the way that land and food are governed reflects political, social, and economic relations on that land. This was especially visible in Yugoslavia, where agriculture presented both an *object* of government to be reformed, and a *tool* for reforming the population. But before expanding on Yugoslav agricultural policy, it is worth noting that agriculture mirrored the more general forms of rule even before WWI. For example, the Ottoman occupation in Serbia worked through the *millet* system — non-Islamic subjects were treated as “protected persons” who were guaranteed their religious autonomy, and they were also nominally free sharecroppers with hereditary rights on land property. This meant the main stratification happened between the (foreign) rulers and the ruled, and in turn allowed Serbia to develop as an egalitarian society of free peasant small-holders.¹¹ Vojvodina, on the other hand, switched between Austro-Hungarian and a short period of Ottoman rule. While under Austro-Hungarian rule, land was used in the process of “colonisation:” mostly German, but also Croatian, French, Italian, Slovak, Armenian, Rumanian, and later Hungarian peasants were relocated to repopulate the previously abandoned areas and pay taxes to fund the defence against the Turks. Larger pieces of land, however, were given to Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches and other elites, and the peasants who received land through the process of colonisation were often the victims of enclosure practices. Because of this, Vojvodina was marked with much larger estates than the rest of the country, and its ethnic make-up is still diverse.¹² In both cases, the population was largely made up of poor, often landless, peasants, and this is the base on which the Yugoslav modernising project took place.

Under Yugoslavia, the government of agriculture reflected the modernizing project of industrialization by decreasing the proportion of the agricultural population. Additionally, it presented an effort at redistribution through progressive land reforms that reflected Yugoslavia’s positioning as a project that brings together economic, social, and political life. As will become clearer below, the experiences of agricultural policy in Yugoslavia can be traced to tensions in its political rationalities, thus echoing Foucault’s accusation that socialism never developed its “art of government.”¹³ The tensions come from the ways that

¹¹ Vujačić, *Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia*, 126. This is a necessary oversimplification of the tenure system. For a detailed account of land tenure practice during the Byzantine and Ottoman rule in Serbia, see Chapter 1 in Tomasevich, *Peasants, Politics, and Economic Change in Yugoslavia*.

¹² For more on this period in Vojvodina, see Chapter 5 in Tomasevich, *Peasants, Politics, and Economic Change in Yugoslavia*.

¹³ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 94.

peasants were imagined as subjects: in the progressive land reforms after the war, they were made *landowners* in an atmosphere where “land to the peasants” was a natural companion to the popular slogan of “factories to the people.” However, it is precisely this *ownership* which made the state always suspicious of peasants—ownership as such was profoundly anti-socialist and seen as leading to capitalist accumulation.¹⁴

The first major land reform was conducted in 1919 with the creation of the Kingdom of Serbia, Croats and Slovenes (First Yugoslavia). Large Austro-Hungarian estates were re-distributed by the state to former serfs [*kmetovi*] who were suddenly free land-owning individuals. Around 1,7 million hectares of land was given to landless people, with priority given to soldiers who fought in WWI and their families. The land was also used for yet another process of colonisation: ethnically Serbian war veterans and the poor were relocated to border areas in Vojvodina, Slavonija, Macedonia, and Metohija and Kosovo to own and work small parcels of land.¹⁵ The land reform, however, was far from perfect. Peasants were supposed to re-pay the cost of the land to its former estate owners which facilitated the creation of indentured labour. Land distribution was distorted by corruption and negotiations with land-owning elites, and the reform itself was never really finished or successful.¹⁶ So despite the policies of the reform being described as progressive, during the First Yugoslavia, the inequality in land ownership grew, and peasants themselves, although comprising sometimes up to 90% of the population, suffered deteriorating living conditions.

In Post-WWII Second Yugoslavia, which came to be known as SFRY, the “village issue” [*pitanje sela*] emerged as key to the total transformation to socialism—the main goals of agricultural and land policy were nothing less than the abolishment of capitalist relations and the socialist transformation of villages. Here, the individual peasant becomes a problem to be contained—due to their ownership of land and “the interest in the tractor” as a form of means of production, the individual producer was considered to be an “anti-socialist and capitalist element.”¹⁷ In a detailed account of the Yugoslav economic system, Branko Horvat provides a timeline of three policy periods in Yugoslav agriculture: *etatist* collectivisation from 1949 to 1953, a focus on cooperation as an alternative to collectivisation in 1954-1965,

¹⁴ Horvat, *The Yugoslav Economic System*, 349–50.

¹⁵ Giordano summarizes the goals in two points: answering the “social question” by carrying out acts of justice and transferring land from the rich to the poor, and nationalizing territory by ethicizing landed property. Giordano, ‘The Ethnicization of Agrarian Reforms: The Case of Interwar Yugoslavia’, 34.

¹⁶ Lazić, *Poljoprivredna proizvodnja [Agricultural production]*, 43; cited in Srećković, ‘Istorijat agrarnih reformi [History of Agrarian Reforms]’, 515.

¹⁷ Horvat, *The Yugoslav Economic System*, 349–50.

and the *laissez-faire* approach from 1965 onwards.¹⁸ I will follow a similar outline to highlight how these reforms are layered upon each other and still shape the experience of agriculture in Serbia today.

The first period was marked by a new land reform that worked to collectivise agriculture based on the Soviet model. While the focus was on creation of the Peasant Working Cooperatives, it was always clear that they are only the means to achieve *the more general goal* of socialist transformation.¹⁹ Moreover, party officials were quite clear that the development of such a new form of agriculture does not demand just new technology like agricultural machinery, but also “political and organizational preparation”—teaching peasants how to become new political subjects.²⁰ By developing four types of cooperatives with four different types of land tenure, the state tried to encourage the peasants to join the cooperatives voluntarily by allowing them to keep their land, thus diverging significantly from the Soviet model. The idea was that with increased productivity and general rise in the standard of living, the peasants will one day simply let go of their attachment to private ownership of land.²¹ However, even though the collectivisation was nominally voluntary, in reality, “severe administrative and political pressures,” under the label of “curbing capitalist elements in the village,” targeted the peasants to urge the transformation.²²

The complete transformation of rural political organisation failed. People would kill the livestock they were not allowed to keep as private ownership upon entering the cooperative and cooperative property was destroyed in acts of sabotage. Peasants also speculated with property so as to transform most of it into *okućnica*²³ which they were allowed to keep, and minimise the property that they would be bringing into the cooperative.²⁴ All these acts of resistance led to significantly decreased productivity, and the Soviet model of collectivisation was abandoned in 1953. The land maximum was lowered further, and the extra land was mostly given to (state owned) agricultural enterprises.

This second period focused on cooperation, but it already saw the use of the free market as a tool for transformation: it was supposed to teach the peasants that they have to

¹⁸ Horvat, *The Yugoslav Economic System*.

¹⁹ Tochitch, ‘Collectivization in Yugoslavia’, 27.

²⁰ Tochitch, 28.

²¹ Tochitch, 28.

²² Horvat, *The Yugoslav Economic System*, 229–30.

²³ The literal translation would be “around the house.” It refers to small plots of land the peasants were allowed to keep as private property.

²⁴ Tochitch, ‘Collectivization in Yugoslavia’, 36.

either intensify their production through modernisation (joining the cooperatives that had modern technology made available by the state), or leave agriculture altogether and move to the growing industrial sector that was in desperate need of workers.²⁵ Moreover, by abandoning the efforts at collectivisation and substituting them for “socialization” [*podružtvljavanje*—meaning the transformation of private property into “socially owned property”], Yugoslavia set out on a specific path to socialism which, as we will see, further complicated the issue of land ownership.²⁶ This period also saw the characteristic dual development of agriculture: large collective production alongside small individual production connected by the concept of *cooperation*.²⁷

Since 1961, peasants who were given small plots of land were free to sell them. And they largely did so by entering cooperatives [*zadruga*]. As explained to me in an interview with a retired expert on *zadruga*, this was done for very practical reasons: the child benefits that peasants would get from being employed as workers in cooperatives were more than the income, they could get off their land. This created a boom in the land controlled by cooperatives: in the period of 1961–1968, cooperatives bought more than 190,000ha of agricultural land. Peasants were restricted by the land maximum which was decreased to 10ha, and they used the cooperatives to expand production. They gave up their earnings from the cooperatives and used the money to purchase and hire land, equipment, machinery, and expertise. Since cooperatives did not have any land restrictions to abide by, they provided an opportunity for expansion. All these resources were used to work on cooperative land, as well as the small plots the peasants were allowed to keep as *okućnica*.²⁸ Because property could not be listed as cooperative property, in this way land was socialized and the socially owned sector in the country grew.

After the 1965 general reform in the economy, agriculture policy started relying heavily on the market. In short, a view that “producers would be left to themselves and that a *laissez-faire* approach is most suitable” became dominant.²⁹ After 1968, the liberalisation was even more extreme as the market assumed a more prominent role and the state completely

²⁵ McVicker, ‘Chapter 6: Major Agricultural Reforms’, 107. Also, Horvat, *The Yugoslav Economic System*.

²⁶ Luković, ‘The Country Road to Revolution’.

²⁷ Horvat, *The Yugoslav Economic System*, 236. In making the two co-exist, the state introduced the concept of *cooperation* which determined the relationship between the two while continuing to encourage peasants to join cooperatives

²⁸ Along with works cited in this section, I am obliged to thank Branislav Gulán and Đorđe Bugarin, experts on the topic of *zadruga*, for talking me through the history of different forms of production in Serbia. I especially owe observations about the *experience* of these different state policies to conversations with them.

²⁹ Horvat, *The Yugoslav Economic System*, 346.

retreated from any regulatory functions. This led to rising prices, imports under dumping prices, and an overall stagnation in agricultural development.³⁰ Horvat defines the nature of the problem theoretically: the cooperative was treated at the same time as a business/economic unit that should be governed by market rationality without implicating the state, but also as an “agricultural station that should educate and help the backward to adopt modern agrotechnology without charging the full value of the services provided.”³¹ In a way, its market rationality was in tension with its socialist goals. While space prevents a further discussion of the role of market rationalities in Yugoslav socialism,³² it is important to state that it is with these challenges that Yugoslavian agriculture entered the difficult years of the general crisis in the 1980s.

The 1990s saw a complete transformation of the social order in Serbia, agriculture included.³³ This had a paradoxical effect in agriculture: on the one hand, many people from the cities went back to (semi-)subsistence farming in rural areas to complement their disappearing incomes. On the other hand, farmers producing for the market were destroyed by the inflation. However, as one of my interlocutors explained, those who were brave enough, used the opportunity to expand in these times of crisis. The easiest way to expand (if you were able to hide from the mandatory military draft) was to take on huge bank loans, buy land and machinery, and then pay only a fraction of the loan back after the inflation had done its part.³⁴

These cases of brave agricultural entrepreneurs, however, were not enough to keep agricultural production at a level that would allow the market to operate. The big cooperative and state-owned enterprises were especially hurt by the disappearance of the Yugoslavian market. Additionally, the complicated history of failed collectivisation and the turn to socialization meant that Yugoslavia, along with Poland, were the only countries in Eastern Europe that emerged from socialism with around 85% of land still privately owned.³⁵ So Serbia entered the 2000s with a high percentage of privately owned land, destroyed infrastructure, ruined big enterprises, and as it began its “delayed transition”³⁶ it needed to

³⁰ Horvat, 249. Dumping prices refer to the sale of products in foreign markets for prices lower than their value.

³¹ Horvat, 376.

³² See Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism*.

³³ The concept of social transformation instead of “transition” is usefully employed in Sørensen, *State Collapse and Reconstruction in the Periphery*.

³⁴ Interview with a producer, October 4, 2016.

³⁵ ‘Country Report: Serbia’, 8.

³⁶ I borrow the term from Bieber, ‘The Serbian Opposition and Civil Society’. He analyses the 10-year delay between the first proclamations of independence of Croatia and Slovenia, to the ousting of Milošević in 2000.

deal with both increasing agricultural output in general, and the creation of a land market that would govern the 25% of land that was state owned.³⁷

The early 2000s saw a major shift in the government of agriculture best observed in two documents: the 2004 Strategy for Serbian Agriculture [*Strategija poljoprivrede Srbije*] and the 2006 Law on Agricultural Land. The technocratic government in power was explicitly oriented towards international financial institutions, and they created agricultural policies accordingly. The 2004 Strategy is controversial for two reasons. First, it was officially a product of technical assistance aid to Serbia. It was developed in cooperation between EU experts and the Ministry in 2004 and adopted in the Serbian Parliament in 2005. However, it was widely criticized for not being written *with the help* of a foreign expert, but *by* a foreign expert, with the knowledge and approval of the then Minister.³⁸ While this captured the public's imagination in debates that might resemble discussions on local ownership, practically it matters little *who* wrote the document. What matters is that the Strategy was written in line with the liberal peace narrative of market economics. The Strategy was discussed for its explicit neoliberal orientation and a focus on privatisation, encouraging production for the market, and re-conceptualising the role of the Ministry to be limited to fostering a well-functioning market, and thus abstaining from both advising on comparative advantages and any possible protectionist measures.³⁹ However, this narrative was not a straightforward imposition even if literally written by someone else. It was assembled in an encounter of global neoliberal vision that dominated the discussions of post-communist transitions with the historical experiments with markets in Yugoslavia.

The same can be observed in the Law on Agricultural Land from 2005 which was similarly oriented towards global narratives of neoliberalism and sought to correct the previous experiments in forms of ownership. Mladen, one of the designers of the 2005 Law explained the creation of the Law in a long narrative interview. He started by telling me that he “really believes in the market”, and that the Law was designed precisely to create a well-functioning market which will work to “transfer the land into the hands of those most

³⁷ The amount of this land, however, was much smaller than in other countries in Eastern Europe because Yugoslavia abandoned efforts at collectivisation very early (in 1953). This meant that Yugoslavia (similarly to Poland) emerged from communism with most of the land registered as in private ownership. A document prepared for the FAO in 2006 estimates that out of 5.1 million ha (some 66% of total land), 3.6 million ha are arable land (incl. permanent crops), and 350,000 to 380,000ha are state owned. See ‘Country Report: Serbia’.

³⁸ Naumović, *Fields of Paradox*, 112., states that the 2004 Strategy was written by a Dutch expert employed on the Twinning program between the EU and Serbia.

³⁹ Naumović, 66.

productive and efficient farmers.”⁴⁰ The market is needed to develop a middle class of farmers who would carry Serbian agriculture away from unproductive smallholders and inefficient state enterprises.⁴¹ And in his desire to develop the middle class of farmers, Mladen was clear that it is his way of imagining Serbia becoming a global actor — (semi)subsistence peasants cannot participate in the global markets that Serbia was returning to after a long decade of international isolation, but middle size farmers can. Similarly, in experiments in Yugoslavia, the market was imagined to guide the behaviour of specific producers and usher in both a new form of production and a new subjectivity.

This short historical contextualisation allows us to engage with subjects as existing *outside* the temporal confines of the intervention. In Sabaratnam’s words, it affords the subjects a historical consciousness that is usually stripped away from targets of intervention.⁴² Here, I want to emphasise two things. First, the government of agriculture (and its experiences) always reflected the ideological, political, and economic dynamics of the time in question — whether that was creating the “new socialist man” in place of the pre-socialist peasants as was the case with the SFRY reforms, or the sharp turn towards neoliberalism in the early 2000s in which Serbia ran towards the global ideals of private ownership and market capitalism. Agriculture thus makes visible connections between wider visions of government and individual subjectivities. However, as already mentioned in Chapter 2, I do not treat these blueprints as anthropological facts — i.e. literally translated into reality. I examine them as schemes with real life consequences that transcend their intended fields of effects.

Second, these schemes of agricultural government in Yugoslavia always developed in intricate relationships with empires, foreign policies, and global flows of ideas: from the Ottoman and Hapsburg Empires who drew the lines still visible on the make-up of farms in the region, to the Soviet influence over collectivisation (and lack thereof), and finally to embracing the neoliberal policies in the early 2000s in the rush to return to the fold of international organisations like the World bank and the IMF. The government of agriculture

⁴⁰ Interview, October 4, 2016.

⁴¹ This structure is usually referred as a “dual structure of production:” it is dominated by very small semi-subsistence producers, who mostly farm along with holding other employment, and, on the other hand, very big state enterprises. This makes CAP difficult to implement in Eastern Europe because the “family farm” which is the most common unit of production in the EU, is missing from this picture. Many policies are thus devised at the “farmerization” of producers in Serbia. While some producers have risen to this so-called “middle class,” they still account for only a small fraction of production. It is correct to use Diković’s description of most producers as “neither peasants, nor farmers.”

⁴² Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*, 39–41.

of Serbia always imagined the subjects of agriculture as not just local actors, but as participants in global politics. As the next section will show, this remains true today.

II Governing agriculture through EU integration

In contemporary Serbia, the government of agriculture is shaped by a particular intervention — Europeanisation. The technical expression of Europeanisation is the official EU accession process, the so-called *negotiations* [*pregovori*].⁴³ In this enormous process of development through legislative harmonisation divided into 35 chapters, agriculture comes out as especially important. This is not just because the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)⁴⁴ is famously the EU's biggest expenditure, but also because agriculture in Serbia plays a bigger role than in the average EU state. Agricultural and food industry represents 40% of gross domestic production⁴⁵ and more than 20% of the workforce in Serbia is employed in agriculture, thus making it one of the highest in Europe.⁴⁶ The technical process of EU integration specifically targets agriculture in three chapters of the *acquis communautaire*, the bundle of legislative harmonisation that needs to be completed before a state can become a full member. Chapter 11 (Agriculture and Rural Development), Chapter 12 (Fisheries), and Chapter 13 (Food Safety) account for more than 40% of the *acquis communautaire*. They are so comprehensive that most of the changes in the agricultural and food systems are framed within the so called “Euro-Atlantic integration” [*evro-atlantske integracije*] which are presented as the goal of the transition from Yugoslav socialism to independent liberal democracies in the region.⁴⁷

Even beyond the official EU negotiations, the “return to Europe” in agriculture is the central piece of narratives ranging from state policies to individual aspirations. For example, in the Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Serbia for 2014-2024, the goal is unequivocally to “set the basis of new agricultural policies, defined along the principles of modern public policy and the clear orientation of the Ministry towards the taking on a European model of agricultural support.”⁴⁸ The document goes on to detail the

⁴³ Serbia applied for EU membership in December 2009, it was given official candidate status for EU membership in 2012. The official negotiations started in January 2014, with the first two chapters opened in December 2014.

⁴⁴ Common Agricultural Policy is the EU's system of agricultural subsidies. It is the largest EU expenditure (ca. EUR59 billion/year) and accounts for more than half of the total EU budget.

⁴⁵ Lukač and Gulan, ‘The Agroindustry of the Republic of Serbia and European Integrations’.

⁴⁶ ‘Strategija Poljoprivrede i Ruralnog Razvoja Republike Srbije Za Period 2014-2024. Godine’, sec. 2.1.2.

⁴⁷ Volk, Erjavec, and Mortensen, *Poljoprivredna politika i evropske integracije u Jugoistočnoj Evropi*, 4.

⁴⁸ ‘Strategija 2014-2024 [Strategy 2014-2024]’.

changes in agricultural policy needed to implement CAP, the adoption of the legal framework stipulated in the *acquis communautaire*, and the institutional reforms needed to harmonise administrative structures with those of the EU.

The goals of “modern” policy and the “EU model” of agriculture are worth paying closer attention to. In agriculture, modernity does not relate only to the institutions, but also the “backward” form of agriculture that is prevalent not only in Serbia but in most of Southern Europe. This form of agriculture is characterized by a large number of very small farms, high proportion of subsistence and semi-subsistence producers, lower inputs, and accordingly lower yields.⁴⁹ While such a form might be celebrated in food activist circles that see precisely this kind of agriculture as the antidote to the industrial food complex, in policy circles and agri-business it is presented as a problem of “backwardness” to be overcome by adopting the EU model of agriculture.

Acquiring access to policy makers in the Ministry of Agriculture, or those actually on the negotiating team for the EU negotiations proved more difficult than expected when I arrived in Belgrade. My emails were rarely responded to, and when replies did arrive I received detailed reports and many links but could not get anyone to actually talk to me. An opening unexpectedly happened in one of the youth courses that I attended. The speaker for the particular class was one of the main EU negotiators—a confident, knowledgeable, and quick-thinking man in his early forties. It was obvious that he enjoyed the challenge of EU negotiations. The “us” vs “them” rhetoric snuck into his stories and he was obviously energised by the challenge even though he was the first to tell us that negotiations are “not really negotiating anything” because the EU standards are pre-defined—it is *how*, not *if*, these will be implemented in Serbia that is “negotiated.”

I approached him after his talk to ask for advice on how to continue in my study of agriculture. After I explained that I am interested in the transformations of agriculture he was noticeably excited about my interest and I was increasingly optimistic about my prospects in studying the world of these adroit policymakers. In a quick chat about agriculture in Serbia, he swiftly played with the Serbian translation of *agriculture* as *field economy* [*poljoprivreda*: *polje*=field, *privreda*=economy] and pointed out that the biggest transformation of *poljoprivreda* needed is that people involved start acting like it is in fact *privreda*—people have to understand it as an *economy* and guide their own behaviours by using economic rationalities. I was noticeably shocked by such a straightforward economisation

⁴⁹ Berkum and Bogdanov, *Serbia on the Road to EU Accession*.

and neoliberal reasoning, but my further work in agriculture (indeed substantially helped by this EU negotiator) proved both the importance of this image and its far more complex reality.

Thinking this intervention with governmentality points out the fact that the diagnosis does not stop at the “form of agriculture.” In its governmental reason, it reaches down to subjectivities themselves and ways that they should be produced and enticed to work within this new government. And it is here where we can once again track the connection between forms of rule and three individual subjectivities: the public servants supposed to transform the state along neoliberal lines, the producers themselves who are supposed to become entrepreneurs more responsive to the market, and civil society that is supposed to both participate and mediate between the two.

i. Civil servants

The institutional deficiencies in the Serbian governance have to be corrected through nurturing new types of civil servants that would build these new institutions and reform the public sector. The horror stories about ineffective public sector, people who simply “don’t understand” how the EU works, and Ministries who “refuse to do their homework” are often invoked as an explanation for the slowness of European integration and the lack of progress supposed to accompany it.⁵⁰ The issue, however, is not just the lack of practical knowledge which can be explained by lack of experience — i.e. civil servants who are still learning about how the EU works, so needing help to devise and implement EU legislation at home. The criticism here goes beyond skill into questioning the *will* to learn. In my interview with an EU delegation member, I asked about IPARD⁵¹ funds and it was this lack of will that she found most frustrating:

“It is not that they [Ministry employees], ask too much [i.e. do not know enough], but that they don’t ask at all, they act as if they understand everything, they refuse help that everyone knows they need!”⁵²

While the example I use here is from a foreign employee of the EU delegation, this image of the inefficient, incompetent, and lazy public servant is pervasive: it was repeated to

⁵⁰ Interview, September 29, 2016. EU Delegation, Belgrade. The same narratives are present in the media and the popular discourse as well.

⁵¹ EU’s Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development. IPARD holds the promise of EUR175 million for Serbian agriculture, but it has been delayed multiple times because Serbia failed to create the institutional capacity for distributing funds, namely a functioning Payment Agency.

⁵² Interview, September 29, 2016. EU Delegation, Belgrade.

me by producers to illustrate the lack of state concern for them, by NGOs who bemoan the lag in legislative changes needed to advance the EU integration process, and sometimes even by the people actually working in civil service. In a way, the public sector is demonised not only in policy documents, but also in public narratives. Marek Mikuš examines this phenomenon as a moral project of public-sector retrenchment in Serbia, and identifies the general view of the public sector as multiply immoral: too big, with salaries that are too high, and completely lacking motivation and initiative.⁵³

The Serbian government deals with this mostly through hiring and wage increase bans that the above study by Mikuš explores. The EU, however, has very specific tools for targeting this issue: the twinning and TAIEX programs which seek to transform the public sector by transferring expertise from EU member states to new candidate countries and thus facilitate the *acquis* adoption. These mechanisms are celebrated as peer-to-peer (the transfer happens between experts working in the same departments) and demand-driven (host/candidate countries have to request the program).⁵⁴ While my own ethnographic work did not have access to the everyday working of the Ministry in which I would observe these processes, many works in critical policy studies have addressed these issues.⁵⁵ Specifically, I was fortunate enough that Naumović, a Serbian anthropologist, provided a very detailed account of the twinning project in the Ministry—the first of its kind in Serbia.

Within EU negotiations, the Ministry acts as the Managing Authority for IPA and IPARD funds.⁵⁶ This means that the Ministry has to decide what it needs from the EU (mostly in the form of technical assistance),⁵⁷ and then they contact the EU delegation with their request—a true effort at facilitating local ownership. However, simultaneously with being *invited* to make these decisions, the Ministry is also being specifically trained and *educated* in how to make such decisions. The educational and transformative project is obvious

⁵³ Mikuš, 'The Justice of Neoliberalism', 219.

⁵⁴ For example, see Füle, 'TAIEX and Twinning Activity Report 2012'.

⁵⁵ I was denied access to training that was happening in the Ministry during my stay in Serbia. However, as I interviewed people who participated in them, I was allowed insight into the dynamics of the trainings. In lieu of access, the Ministry and European Integration Office provided me with detailed training reports. In literature, this process is fruitfully unpacked in critical policy studies that often utilize auto-ethnographic methods to explore the world of policy translation. For an example of such work in Post-Yugoslavian spaces, see Lendvai, 'Europeanization of Social Policy?'; Thomas and Bojicic-Dzelilovic, *Public Policy Making in the Western Balkans*; Stubbs, 'Performing Reform in South East Europe'; Stubbs, 'Stretching Concepts Too Far?'; Stubbs and Deacon, 'Transnationalism and the Making of Social Policy in South East Europe'.

⁵⁶ IPA refers to the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance which allows candidate countries to access EU funds, and IPARD is its rural development component.

⁵⁷ There are four main ways of using IPA funds: technical assistance, twinning programmes, investment projects (such as procuring equipment), and financial arrangements with other financial institutions.

in official documents Naumović worked with when they state that “[t]wo of the most important, non-measurable but visible results of twinning are network building and *change of attitudes and behaviours*.”⁵⁸

Naumović points out this odd combination of very strict contract conditions and surface level local ownership gestures but does not theoretically pursue it. In a way, this is not just giving freedom in the form of local ownership, but also *shaping* it in a very particular manner. This phenomenon has already been explored in investigations of civil society formation, but even though TAIEX and twinning programs remain in the domain of the state rather than civil society, the same dynamics are visible: while seemingly empowering and facilitating the creation of “active and productive” civil servants, these techniques can be seen as a “deep-running form of governmental control over the nature of individuals, society, and governance in target states.”⁵⁹ The interesting point here is the process happening *within* the state, rather seemingly outside of it in civil society.

Another fascinating aspect of Naumović’s account is the interview material provided by EU partners working in Serbia which heavily draw on the Balkan identity as a problem to be overcome: the inability/unwillingness of the staff to change, the communist legacy that has “culturally corrupted people” and “corrupted peoples’ minds.”⁶⁰ He analyses the process through the lens of culture and interprets practices like Twinning in the following:

“So, the thesis defended here is that they are not only instruments for the formal implementation of the *acquis*, for long term whole sector technical assistance, and for institution building, but also vehicles of *low profile acculturation of Easterners* into the legal and administrative cultures of the EU, all of which at present also happen to be working equivalents, surrogates so to say, of a still lacking general European culture.”⁶¹

Acculturation means changing the norms, values, ways of thinking and relating to oneself and others—a targeting of subjectivities. More than pointing to the governmental power of this kind of intervention, his account makes clear that this change in culture has a very specific goal: facilitating the neoliberal agenda presented in the Strategy for Agriculture

⁵⁸ European Court of Auditors, ‘Special Report No 6/2003’; cited in Naumović, *Fields of Paradox*, 59. Emphasis added.

⁵⁹ Kurki, ‘Governmentality and EU Democracy Promotion’, 351; See also Tagma, Kalaycioglu, and Akcali, ‘“Taming” Arab Social Movements’; Malmvig, ‘Free Us from Power’.

⁶⁰ Interview with a foreign expert in the Twinning program, cited in Naumović, *Fields of Paradox*, 86–87.

⁶¹ Naumović, 60. Emphasis added.

from 2005.⁶² A new government of agriculture—one markedly more neoliberal—indeed needs new civil servants.

More than showing that governmentality can go beyond explaining civil society building and move into the state, this perceived incompetence of civil servants sits uneasily with the brain drain that is happening in Serbian public institutions and that is acknowledged even in reports of technical assistance: if everyone is slow and inefficient, how are they moving on to get jobs in the highly competitive private sector? Talking to people who worked and are still working in the public sector, I learned that this particular area of agricultural governance is shaped by a different intervention—the hiring and wage increase bans introduced as a structural benchmark in IMF-led efforts at “government rightsizing.” Ever since the first IMF stand-by agreement in 2001 (and then again in 2009, 2012, 2015), the government—with the public’s support—has worked towards public-sector retrenchment.⁶³ Under these bans, Serbian civil servants work for salaries that barely (if at all) cover the cost of living in Belgrade. Those who give up and leave are not replaced because of the hiring ban. Moreover, the Prime-Minister-turned-President Vučić, in a demonstration of economic rationality, issued a special decree that gives public servants only 1 euro per travelling day.⁶⁴ This is in stark tension with the fact that IPARD projects are inspected by controllers who spend most of their time traveling and are thus left without an allowance to actually cover the cost of that traveling.⁶⁵

This is not lost on the policy makers in Serbia and the EU. In an interview with a high-level agricultural expert that participated in the Croatian negotiations, this brain drain was explained to me as a “post-negotiation exodus.” While her experience was that the brain drain happened *after* Croatia was admitted to the EU and many experts who led it (including her), moved to open private consultancies, she observed it is *already* happening in Serbia.⁶⁶ Even the EU delegation employee who I quoted above, and who expressed great frustration with the state of the Ministry, accepted that the problem was similar in all of “these countries” (meaning new member states): staff is trained, and then the staff leaves. There is definitely

⁶² Naumović, 66–68, 152.

⁶³ Mikuš, ‘The Justice of Neoliberalism’. Mikuš provides an excellent contextualisation of the project of public-sector retrenchment within teleological narratives of transition, IMF stand-by agreements, and the late-Yugoslavian anti-bureaucratic revolution which similarly targeted the public sector for its lavish and expensive lifestyle. For IMF stand-by agreements, see p. 215, 223.

⁶⁴ In October 2015, the *per diem* allowances for civil servants were decreased from 2556RSD to 150RSD.

⁶⁵ The issue of the controllers’ daily pay was brought to my attention in the interview with an anonymous member of the EU delegation. The contextualisation of the pay with Vučić decree I owe to Bojan Elek.

⁶⁶ Interview with a former member of the EU Negotiation Team in Croatia, in charge of Agriculture and Rural Development. September 20, 2016, Zagreb.

the neoliberal activation of subjects—people are trained to develop institutions and to teach them *how to* practice their local ownership thus shaping both subjects and the state that they make. However, this activation is also shaped (and frustrated) by a very material political economy of employment—a political economy made at the intersection of local circumstances and neoliberal narratives that mix between the IMF and local elites.

The issue of activation through acculturation, and the failure to accomplish it because of the brain drain, point to the added value of ethnographic approaches. There are studies that examine the tension between efforts to promote local ownership and their pairing with very strict project requirements that results in a specific form of power; and there are policy-oriented studies which touch upon the lived reality of brain drain. However, my point here is bringing them into conversation. From a governmentality perspective, the brain drain remains hidden until inquiring into experiences of people who are targeted by these techniques. It shows that neoliberal governmentality obvious in EU documents does not work as “intended.” It does not change state policies and cultures because the people who it alters end up leaving. However, it does not mean that these practices do not have effects. In Serbia, they helped create a burgeoning private sector of consultants, and a non-governmental sector of international organisations that attract people formerly employed in public administration. This affects both the state and the wider political economy of agricultural government.

ii. From peasants to farmers

New types of producers are needed to engage with these institutions. In my fieldwork, I often heard disparaging accounts of producers from policy makers. For example, an FAO employee (who was previously employed in the Ministry for eight years) referred to producers as “energy vampires”—people whose complaining and demands make working with them impossible.⁶⁷ On other occasions, other former employees of the Ministry arranged interviews for me by choosing the “good examples”—farmers who they thought *stand out* from the backwardness that marks the average Serbian producer. Even producers themselves always differentiated themselves as “capable” from *those others* smaller/located in the South/older that are not able to deal with the demands of modern agriculture. This diagnosis translates into a view of modernisation and transition as *transformations of* the identities of the subjects themselves—turning peasants into farmers.⁶⁸ This transformation is

⁶⁷ Interview, October 11, 2016.

⁶⁸ Diković, ‘Neither Peasant, Nor Farmer: Transformations of Agriculture in Serbia after 2000’.

underlined by an understanding that these subjects should be guided by economic rationalities. For example, the 2014 Strategy for Agriculture refers to producers in the following terms:

“One of the most delicate issues of the future development of the agricultural sector is the especially unfavourable age and educational structure of the agricultural workforce. This problem is significant from both the aspect of the social structure of rural areas, and from the aspect of human potential capacity for adopting new technologies, changing the production structure, and many others.”⁶⁹

Put simply—the producers are old and not educated enough to make appropriate decisions on what they will grow, and how they will use new technologies to grow it. This is not a surprising narrative.

The idea that something about the subjectivities of the producers is to blame for the lack of development in Serbian agriculture has a long history. Thiemann, for example, reviews literature that identifies the reasons for Serbian underdevelopment in the “lack of capitalist spirit” and the “lack of work discipline.”⁷⁰ Similarly, the discussions within Yugoslavia revolved around issues like the peasants’ irrational attachment to their land, their “ownership mentality,” or their conservative and unenterprising nature.⁷¹ In a way, the peasant was always framed as lacking modernity, and always the target of different practices that would bring them into modernity.

During Yugoslavia, this problem was referred to as “agrarian overpopulation.” The image of fast industrialising socialist society could not tolerate a high percentage of backward peasants. More than guiding producers into “higher” forms of production such as cooperatives, the socialist government was very clear on the fact that a large part of the peasants needs to relocate to the cities and become industrialised—they need to become (self-managing) workers in the factory, the base of Yugoslav socialism. Today, the peasants are encouraged to consolidate land, embrace new technologies, and practice market rationality by fitting their production into “fundable” projects that will win subsidies. However, no one really talks about what will happen with those who do not fit in this project agriculture. This is the point of departure between the old socialist policies and contemporary ones: the

⁶⁹ ‘Strategija 2014-20124 [Strategy 2014-2024]’, 17.

⁷⁰ Sundhaussen, ‘Die Verpasste Agrarrevolution’, 45, 49, 59; Palairat, *The Balkan Economies c. 1800 - 1914*; cited in Thiemann, ‘The Moral Appreciation of Social Security’, 24; Also, Palairat, ‘The Economic Consequences of Slobodan Milošević’.

⁷¹ Horvat, *The Yugoslav Economic System*, 201.

current policies do not spend much time discussing where those who fail to turn from peasants into farmers should go.

This was perhaps most painfully illustrated to me in the phrase “cleansing of statistics” used by a former member of the EU negotiating team that participated in the Croatian accession. The overcrowded numbers of small farms that are too high in countries like Serbia are going to be spontaneously “cleansed” by natural death of an ageing population and the financial demise of another portion of them.⁷² This particular silence cannot be examined by focusing on policy texts, it remains unsaid even though it is a defining feature of EU integration in agriculture.

But even though no one explicitly talks about this catastrophe that awaits small semi-subsistence farmers in the EU, there is also no illusion that this transformation from peasants to entrepreneurial subjects will go smoothly.⁷³ While I tried to learn about CAP, about IPARD, about the interaction between multiple layers of government, project funding, and calls for those projects, I was embarrassed to admit that I was overwhelmed by the information. There is a joke in agricultural policy that there is only one person on the planet who truly understands CAP, but the joke is lost on producers who are forced to deal with CAP and similar systems. In short, people who know how to farm and market their products, now also have to become literate in project writing and doing. They have to learn to express their lives in numbers, calls, and project-language that they are far-removed from. Again, this is not lost on anyone. The issue of “how much money is *used*” from EU funds is discussed as a point of critique for both the government and the producers as beneficiaries of these funds (i.e. the government is not providing the institutions to process the funds, and the producers lack the will and the skill to apply for them).

How this difficulty is mitigated, however, is a matter of debate. The logical step would be to delegate project writing help to Local Advising Services [*lokalne savetodavne službe*] whose job should be to support farmers with technological and other advice (and whose hiring practices are subject to the same hiring ban as the rest of the public sector). In reality, however, private consultancy businesses take this role and we are now seeing an emergence of a whole new market for project writing. Additionally, these projects require large bank

⁷² Interview, September 20, 2016.

⁷³ The dairy industry in Croatia, for example, has been dramatically shrinking since Croatia joined the EU. This, however, is rarely discussed in Serbia. For a short news article on Croatian dairies, see ‘Proizvodnja Se Srozala, Mljekare Guše Uvoz i Dugovi [Production down, Dairies Suffocated by Imports and Debt]’. At the annual Congress of dairy producers that I attended, this issue was mentioned in passing only once, although the majority of the debate related to imports and exports.

loans because the producers provide the funds that are refunded once the project is completed. So they depend on taking out loans that are later repaid with subsidies. Here, we see that the focus on one subjectivity—turning a peasant into a farmer, contributes to a much larger political economy. This political economy does not only create a new sector of private consultancies and loans, but also excludes small producers who do not have the time to learn to write projects, or the funds to pay someone else to do it for them, from participating in IPARD and other similar schemes.⁷⁴

A part of this larger political economy is a rigid differentiation of subjects. Techniques of activation seemingly target a homogenous producer subject, but in reality, some subjects are expected to disappear, many are expected to employ consultants instead of learning new skills, and a specific stratum are already entrepreneurial enough to be engaged directly. While many policy makers implied the differentiation between peasants and farmers in conversations and in who they were recommending me to talk to, the most literal illustration came from the same person who referred to farmers as “energy vampires.” After I told him I spoke to some farmers’ associations, he offered commiseration: it must have been *difficult* to speak with such *difficult* people. But he also had a redemptive example: in wheat production, there is a well-functioning association, not “difficult” at all, and made up of “big players,”—exporters. The FAO “listens to their needs” and then tries to feed them into policy through FAO projects on public-private partnerships.⁷⁵ It is these “players” that are engaged into the new political economy of projects, it is these farms that will apply for subsidies and get them, and it is these people who are the new *farmers*.

Here, we see the point that was already raised in previous chapters: policies do not only determine the future, they also diagnose the present. And the diagnosis in Serbian agriculture for a long time depended on creating the producer as a backward Balkan subject. The EU intervention here does not simply “invent” the subjects that need to be transformed, but the intervention is a specific embodiment of a much longer process of modernisation.

⁷⁴ Otten makes the same observation in his PhD thesis and the short article coming out of it. Since Macedonia got access to IPARD funds earlier, he was able to evaluate the on-going implementation of the programme. He comes to the unsurprising conclusion about how small producers are excluded through both co-financing stipulations of IPARD funds, and through not having access to personal connections that would help them navigate the state bureaucracy. Otten, ‘Responses to EU Rural Development Initiatives’; Otten, ‘The Neoliberal “Katastrofa”’ esp. Chapter 5.

⁷⁵ A separate issue, brought up in the same interview, is that even these big players do not have any tariff protection. While this larger context stays outside of the scope of this project, it leaves it to her to point out that even the elite strata of Serbian producers still lives a very peripheral experience of political economy.

Denaturalising these images is a process that starts with surprise. Ethnographic methodologies enable these surprises. Coming from literature that explicitly and implicitly paints people as lacking the drive and creativity to improve their conditions, one is struck by the rich practices and strategies employed by real people we meet. This should be anticipated—when talking to people in Serbia, one is talking to people who had the entrepreneurship, creativity, resilience, and capacity to survive 10 years of various sanctions and NATO bombings. Building onto this surprise, two particular studies of agriculture in Serbia sought to provide alternative interpretations of agricultural outcomes in Serbia. Thiemann and Naumović, instead of blaming subjects or the culture they are a part of, point out the “adverse macroeconomic conditions, the unsound agricultural policy in Serbia, and the moral economy of capitalist market exchange” that make the experience of Serbian agriculture.⁷⁶ These are structural circumstances that cannot be explained through an exclusive focus on subjectivity, but are needed to make sense of experiences of modernisation in Serbian agriculture.

My point, however, is not just to point to structural explanations that are hidden by a depoliticising discourse on individual subjectivities. First, as already discussed theoretically in Chapter 1, I want to emphasise that the connection between a particular diagnosis, a form of government, and the subjectivities that are targeted by it is not a completely new invention of contemporary neoliberalism. On the contrary, we see here that the image of the backward producer is situated both historically and in a more general mental map of the Balkans. This complicates the idea of neoliberal governmentality as something new, and as always the same—here it is layered upon a history of trying to reimagine producers as subjects, and it is connected to a resilient image of backwardness. Second, this short review shows that intervention in agriculture in fact targets populations—the projects, calls, and narratives of the EU attempt to devise a new way of governing agriculture populated by new subjects. However, looking into experiences of these projects pointed out that these subjectivities are a lot more varied than one *homo oeconomicus* that is supposed to replace the peasantry with farmers. Some are expected to disappear, some are encouraged to grow further, and the majority is stuck in trying to survive.

iii. Civil society

The peculiar situation of civil society involved in the transformation of agriculture under the EU’s guidance is best demonstrated in the working of the National Convention on

⁷⁶ Thiemann, ‘The Moral Appreciation of Social Security’, 26.

the European Union (NCEU). NCEU is a body that “aim[s] to facilitate cooperation between the National Assembly and the civil society during the process of the EU accession negotiations.”⁷⁷ It is structured around thematic working groups that gather civil society organisations and feed their input into EU negotiations. It is a model developed in Slovakia, and it was adopted in Serbia after the Croatian negotiation process was accused of including civil society “too little and too late.” The structure imagines civil society groups commenting on screening reports and action plans which make the body of the EU negotiation process—this structure is made with the goal of implementing a “consultation process” between the Serbian government and the civil society and thus promoting local ownership of the process beyond the state. As such, it is civil society that has ownership of the reforms as they take on the role of watchdogs and evaluators of compliance with the *acquis*.

The Agriculture and Rural Development Working Group is in charge of Chapters 11, 12, and 13 of the *acquis* and officially lists over 90 members. However, its operation is problematic. For example, the planned Working Group Meeting was postponed during the whole 10 months that I spent in Serbia, so I only got reports from it from interlocutors that worked to keep me in the loop after I had already departed. Miloš, who runs a small NGO which evaluates and monitors government policies in relation to agriculture, animal welfare, and environmental protection, explained the meeting in an email:

“Imagine, even though the Government of Serbia adopted the guidelines for including civil society, National Convention, and the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, the Ministry did not publicly publish the draft of the Action Plan, but it delivered it only to NCEU with the invitation for us to send the comments. The meeting held in December was only *pro forma*—the Ministry representatives just presented the Action Plan like we didn’t read it already. I left the meeting. All in all, in NCEU I have no support to try to demand that process should be transparent and inclusive, and other organisations obviously don’t care either, so I have to go alone and insist on it. NCEU obviously wants monopoly and will not insist on opening up the process, nor on respecting the guidelines. There, I’m bitterly disappointed by ‘my own’ [people].”

He continued in a follow-up email:

“The Ministry will never admit that they are missing expertise, and it’s mainly populated by dilettantes and incompetents [*nesposobne osobe*]. Accepting the CSO suggestions is the worst that can happen to them. Until now, they never cooperated

⁷⁷ ‘About the National Convention on the EU’.

with anyone except with a few CSO who applauded them. And NCEU wants to monopolise [the process] because of donors, horrible.”⁷⁸

There are a few things going on here. First, the *pro forma* status of the meeting does not come as a surprise. I had previously attended a more general meeting of all NCEU groups in April 2016 and was faced with a similar feeling. As NCEU members explained to me in breaks of the meeting, what we are witnessing is not a *process* (used in relation to the “consultation process”), but a *simulation of a process*. Beyond providing for very boring meetings, this allows the government to tick the boxes of civil society cooperation, but it also permits specific civil society organisations to similarly play into the game by producing *pro forma* reports and suggestions that use donor money and do not substantially change anything. But more than “doing nothing,” the box ticking exercise deflects any future call for transparency and local ownership—they are already there! As will be discussed below, this deflection and the state-civil society relationships that it enables reconceptualises all actors involved.

Second, Miloš’ experience of EU intervention does not fit the usual story of neoliberal governmentality techniques as empowering. Miloš did not feel empowered but silenced by the EU mandated process of consultation. He was ready to act as the limit to government just like Foucault imagines in his discussions of civil society, but he could not perform that role. The techniques that invite CSOs to apply for funding, embrace project-life, and imagine government as a negotiation between the civil society, the officials, and the public are very much alive in Serbia. However, their effects are reduced to box-ticking exercises: like sending out the Action Plan to a select few CSOs the night before comments on the multiple-hundred-page document are due, holding a meeting to note their comments without any engagement, and reporting to the EU that the civil society has been consulted.

Yet the EU stipulations are not without effect: they might not be creating “ownership” as imagined, but they actively created a special relationship between the Serbian government and NCEU who competes for EU funds, receives them, and creates the civil society as the employer that I discussed from the youth perspective in the previous chapter.⁷⁹ This process was investigated in Mikuš’ work on Europeanisation and civil society in Serbia. His work invites us to see all actors involved differently: the state is “Europeanised” as it is

⁷⁸ I was granted explicit permission to use the correspondence.

⁷⁹ The ambiguous relationship between the Serbian state and the (mostly) foreign funded civil society is examined in Mikuš, ‘Civil Society and EU Integration’; Vetta, ‘NGOs and the State: Clash or Class? Circulating Elites of “Good Governance” in Serbia’.

restructured along neoliberal lines and projectivized through a novel and intimate relationship with civil society. The civil society is politically charged and ambiguously connected to the state, and the EU integration process stops being a technical process of *acquis* adoption and is recast as “a political and cultural process of persuasion” that works to “build consent for neoliberal globalization and restructuring.”⁸⁰

Through an approach that weaves together personal biographies and institutional histories, Mikuš highlights the fact that only *some*—big NGOs who are either elites or a part of the middle classes—are engaged in this process of transformation.⁸¹ Miloš is obviously not among them, yet his experience reveals much about this process—thus pointing to things that do not just help make sense of *his* experience, but things that tell us more about how the state, civil society, and EU integration function in contemporary Serbia.⁸²

To conclude this part of the chapter, it is worth restating that governmentality points to the subjects created in the project of agricultural transformations: public servants should competitively invest in themselves as human capital as they strive to build better institutions, the farmers should learn to respond better to market needs through innovation and adaptation to accomplish profits, and civil society should be there to both provide services abandoned by the state and to mediate between the state and the citizens. *Poljoprivreda* needs to be governed as a *privreda*. The subsuming of life under economic market rule is easily discernible in this narrative, but, as the previous section showed, even in these explicit attempts at forming new subjects, there are a plethora of processes that might remain out of sight if we are to focus only on the official discourse. We have seen the brain drain and the expected failure of the producers to learn to function with project-life. We also uncovered the wider political economy of private consultancies and loans that is supported by the same techniques that seek to activate producers. This is what the methodological and analytical orientation of the thesis uncovered so far. The next section will show how an entire field of government, otherwise unseen, emerged from it.

⁸⁰ Mikuš, ‘Civil Society and EU Integration’, 163–64.

⁸¹ Mikuš, ‘Civil Society and EU Integration’; Mikuš, ‘Public Advocacy in Serbia’; Mikuš, ‘Informal Networks’.

⁸² For an ethnographic study of class-based politics in the development of the LEADER program in Croatia—a framework for local ownership in rural development was being developed in Serbia as well during my stay—see Lukić and Obad, ‘New Actors in Rural Development - The LEADER Approach and Projectification in Rural Croatia’.

III From agriculture to land policy

As the above section showed, a view of EU accession as intervention points us to the giant apparatus of EU negotiations. The importance of EU policy here cannot be overstated: it seeks to reform *ways* and *subjects* of governing agriculture. So, it is hardly surprising that I went to Serbia thinking I will be discussing CAP and IPARD. The ethnographic approach to governmentality, however, led me to notice different kinds of subject-making in the field of agricultural development. As I started following the discussions in agricultural government in Serbia, I was struck by the salience of one topic completely absent from the *acquis*—that of land use. My conversations with producers and farmers' associations always pointed to land: the producers felt cheated by the changes happening in leasing regulations, they were worried that there will not be enough land and that the government is creating unfair competition, they protested what they saw as injustice. The media was similarly full of discussions about land: how much agricultural land does Serbia actually have, how can thousands of hectares "disappear," who is leasing state-owned agricultural land, who is paying for it and who is occupying it illegally; what is going to happen from September 1st 2017 when foreign citizens will be able to buy agricultural land in Serbia under SAA stipulations; who was compensated for the socially owned land that was privatised in the 1990s and 2000s? These were all questions that were not only urgent, but also contested. Importantly, these were issues that did not see many practices of neoliberal governmentality. Power did not seem productive and dispersed. Instead, people I spoke to talked about authoritarian state power, corruption, and dispossession. Yet, because I was not there to *validate* any account of neoliberal governmentality, but to *listen* to the concerns of people imagined to develop in the process of agricultural transformation, land emerged as an important field to make sense of these experiences.

It does not take an agricultural expert to see that the land ownership system underlines all other policies that govern practices on the land itself. However, the effect is increased by the fact that, since the de-coupling of the CAP payments in 2003, land, as opposed to previously productivity, became the basis for all the CAP expenditure.⁸³ In the

⁸³ Farmers receive payments based on the number of hectares, no matter if they are producing on that land or not. It is heavily criticized for once again favouring the concentration of land and big producers. Interestingly, Serbia had been implementing various interpretations of the same policy since 2005. This was described as both emulating CAP and facilitating corruption. For a quick review of subsidy policy in Serbia, see: Volk, Erjavec, and Mortensen, *Agricultural Policy and European Integration in Southeastern Europe*, 161–66.

EU today, just owning agricultural land literally makes money. And more than half of the EU's budget is allocated to these (land) subsidies.

In Serbia, the discussion around land often revolves around the problematic size of the average parcel. This problematic fragmentation was targeted by a project in which the state and local governments cooperated with the EU and the German government. Under the title of technical assistance, the projects saw the testing of a new IT system for leasing state owned land, pilot projects of land consolidation and returning abandoned land to use, and assistance with the development of drafts of by-laws elaborated for the Law on Agricultural Land.⁸⁴ While the project was mentioned to me as one of the biggest successes of GIZ, consolidation processes are generally experienced as aiding those already successful.⁸⁵ Besides this project, land is treated as a “national” question and the EU does not regulate it beyond including it in the stipulations on the free movement of capital. Paradoxically then, the land that is the basis of CAP payments—the ultimate goal of agricultural transformation—is seemingly removed from EU policies. Similarly, it was removed from my own understanding of changes happening in Serbian agriculture. But as I spoke to people whose transformation is imagined in the above narratives, land politics emerged as crucial.

Governing agricultural land refers to different ways that agricultural land is used, leased, and sold in markets. Who can own land, how, and why is far from straightforward and it is ultimately intertwined with forms of rule on the land itself. In countries emerging from communism, the issue of land ownership became crucial for the imagined road to well-functioning democracy and capitalist markets. In many narratives, it is precisely private ownership of land that serves as the “basis for rebuilding the economy by way of free interaction between property owners.” The protection of private property then “guarantee[s] the autonomy of the individual and the existence of the liberal economy, state of law and civil society.”⁸⁶ Land becomes the basis of peace, democracy, and market economics—it orients narratives of transition, and underpins ideas on development.

As already mentioned, Yugoslavia's ideological project reflected directly on land policy. Its progressive land reforms echoed the more wide-ranging efforts at achieving modernity and equality. In Horvat's account of the Yugoslav economic system, the 1960s

⁸⁴ Interview with an employee in GIZ in charge of the LC project, February 22, 2016. See also Gvozdenović and Knezevic, ‘Implementation of Improved LC Model’.

⁸⁵ Diković, ‘The Practices of Land Ownership in Vojvodina: The Case of Aradac’.

⁸⁶ Siegrist and Müller, ‘Introduction’, 3.

are referenced as the time when Yugoslavia had “the most egalitarian distribution of land in the world” —a point of international pride. And it is this international positioning that shaped Yugoslav land policy, and its current legacy on the fields all around Serbia. By international positioning, here I refer both to the split with Stalin, and the integration with the world (Western) market. The split with Stalin (along with resistance to efforts of collectivisation) enabled Yugoslavia to abandon collectivisation of land as its ultimate goal. In the re-working of Yugoslav socialism away from Stalinist ideology, the state was imagined to ultimately wither away, and thus could not take ownership of land. As already mentioned, the post-1953 cooperative ownership was transformed into social ownership through the process of *podružtvljavanje* (socializing property), as the “basis of socialist transformation.” Peasants’ private holding were limited, and they expanded by buying land into socially owned enterprises. Hence, peasants in Yugoslavia reworked notions of ownership and the amount of socially owned land accordingly grew.⁸⁷

The importance of this change cannot be overstated: other communist countries with histories of forced collectivisation emerged in the 1990s with huge amounts of land in state ownership and embarked on a complex process of restitutions.⁸⁸ Yugoslavia, on the other hand, emerged with a smaller percentage of state-owned land, but similarly intricate difficulties of determining who exactly owns land that was accumulated as “social” ownership. Even though the Constitution from 1996 once again recognized cooperative ownership (after merging it with social and state ownership in 1962), the land owned by *zadrugas* was never untangled from the socially owned enterprises that used the cooperative land.⁸⁹ When the 2006 Constitution removed the category of social ownership (turning it into private ownership), the land was not returned to cooperatives, but registered as the ownership of the state enterprises.⁹⁰ This set the stage for an incredibly complex, and corrupt, process of privatisation.

⁸⁷ Luković, ‘The Country Road to Revolution’.

⁸⁸ Dorondel, *Disrupted Landscapes*; Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare*.

⁸⁹ Unlike the rest of Eastern Europe, the land/property transformation in Yugoslavia received surprisingly little attention. For a short, but rare, engagement with land policy from a perspective of historical anthropology, see Diković, ‘The Practices of Land Ownership in Vojvodina: The Case of Aradac’.

⁹⁰ The privatisation is usually described as having “low legitimacy,” as in Zivanovic-Miljkovic and Popovic, ‘Land Use Regulation and Property Rights Regime over Land in Serbia’, 25. For details on the privatisation of agricultural enterprises and cooperative land, see the 2012 report by The Anti-Corruption Council, available in English. ‘Report on State-Owned and Cooperative Land in the Privatization Process’. Also see the more recent publication from the same Council, this time only in Serbian: ‘Приватизација и Располагање Пољопривредним Земљиштем [Privatization and Disposal of Agricultural Land]’. The added international dimension of these privatisations are not only international sales, but also the fact that the Law on Privatisation

This assignment of land as state ownership was done to facilitate privatisation. The ruined agricultural companies were worthless without the land attached to them.⁹¹ A document prepared for the FAO in 2006 estimates that around 70% of all state-owned enterprises in Serbia at the time were in agricultural production and food processing.⁹² This made the sector crucial for privatisation, but without land, there would be no interested buyers. And without the buyers, the privatisations stipulated by aid donors could not go forward.

The complexity of land use in Serbia, however, does not end with land magically appearing in state ownership before sales—much of the land that was not sold, continued being used by the newly established private companies under the process commonly known as *uzurpacija* (usurpation). The state knew about it, but it also knew that it cannot enforce land tenure and drive forward the privatisation process at the same time. In the words of the former Minister, the deal in the early 2000s was “you buy this part, and you get that part until the state figures out what it’s doing.”⁹³ And it is this privatisation and the problematic transfer of ownership that remain highly contested—two major reports were issued by the Anti-Corruption Council,⁹⁴ numerous case-based efforts at disputing leases and sales happen all around Vojvodina, and any effort to invest in land is faced with layers of different programs of land management. This was the scene I entered when arriving to fieldwork in 2016.

i. Contemporary land use

If you mention agricultural land in Serbia today, most people will directly associate it with the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) signed with the EU which guarantees EU nationals the right to buy agricultural and forest land in Serbia from September 1, 2017.⁹⁵ The issue is exaggerated by the fact that all new member states in the

was written with the help of the World Bank in 2002. For a succinct and policy-oriented overview of different waves of privatisation in Serbia, see Prelec, ‘New Privatisation Wave’.

⁹¹ The demarcation of land was supposed to be done through the Republic Geodetic Authority, but it was referred through a personal letter that promised the process to be done through the re-writing of the Law on Cooperatives. This did not happen until late 2016 when the FAO helped prepare the new draft of the Law on Cooperatives. I thank an anonymous interviewee for frankly describing this complex process.

⁹² ‘Country Report: Serbia’.

⁹³ Interview, October 4, 2016.

⁹⁴ ‘Report on State-Owned and Cooperative Land in the Privatization Process’; ‘Приватизација и Располагање Пољопривредним Земљиштем [Privatization and Disposal of Agricultural Land]’.

⁹⁵ SAA—part of the Stabilisation and Association Process and European Neighbourhood Policy. The agreement includes specific provisions for future EU membership and details the policy harmonisation necessary. It entered into force on September 1st, 2014, after all member states and Serbia finished the ratification process.

last rounds of EU enlargement managed to include a moratorium on the liberalisation of land market, and subsequently prolonged it.⁹⁶ Serbia, for reasons unknown, did not even try to negotiate these terms. People explained it to me in different ways: some believe that the negotiating team could not possibly imagine Serbia will still be outside the EU in 2017 and hence did not take the date seriously, some blamed it on stupidity, others saw private interests from people who knew they would be able to sell land acquired through privatisation. No matter what the logic was, the moratorium was not negotiated and the requirements for the free movement of capital spelled out in Article 63., point 2, of the SAA, thus came into direct confrontation with the Law on Agricultural Land from 2006 which prohibits foreign nationals from owning land.⁹⁷

Consequently, the discussions and demands for changing the Law were framed around this issue: it is impossible to renegotiate the SAA because it would require each EU member state to ratify it again in its changed form, so it is national laws that need to change.⁹⁸ This was captured by civil society groups who called for the changes in the law, namely, that instead of *forbidding* foreign nationals from owning land which would put it in direct confrontation with the SAA, Serbia devises ways of “demotivating” foreign nationals from buying land as many European countries do—by setting other restrictions other than the nationality of the buyer, for example, the number of years living in the village in which the land is, level of education, etc.

The efforts are best captured in two documents. The first one is a special edition of the Student Economic Law Review which was created in cooperation with the then director of the Directorate for Agricultural Land and a Professor at the Belgrade Faculty of Law on the topic of *Regimes of Property Acquisitions on Agricultural Land*.⁹⁹ The document examined different country case-studies in search of a model that would allow Serbia to copy best practices and avoid the complete liberalisation of the land market in 2017. The main point can be summarized as: if Serbian legislature is already a “copy” of EU frameworks, let it copy those laws which are useful.

⁹⁶ For details, see Swinnen and Vranken, “Review of the Transitional Restrictions Maintained by New Member States on the Acquisition of Agricultural Real Estate.”

⁹⁷ ‘Stabilisation and Association Agreement’.

⁹⁸ For more information on the Law on Agricultural Law that was active with minor amendments from 2006 to 2015, see Zivanovic-Miljkovic and Popovic, ‘Land Use Regulation and Property Rights Regime over Land in Serbia’.

⁹⁹ Jovanić, *Režimi sticanja svojine [Regimes of acquiring property]*.

The second document is the 2014 publication of the above mentioned NCEU. The NCEU publication, even though written by one of the loudest critics of state policy which disadvantages small producers, is clear in that “the main goal of state institution is devising and implementing legal regulation that facilitates the development of free market.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, it states that the “[p]rocess of EU accession is primarily a process of *changing the consciousness of citizens* who exited one system (socialist and to a certain extent undemocratic) and now need to learn the rules of another (capitalist and democratic.)”¹⁰¹ The document goes on to debunk the myth that “the EU wants to destroy domestic agriculture”¹⁰² and effortlessly reconciles the development of small producers, implementation of CAP, liberalisation of land and food markets, and rising standards of living through market competition.¹⁰³ These seemingly disparate ideas are merged in a particular vision of development through “transition” into “Europeanisation”—a framework that imposes a teleological coherence on conflictual policies, and shows faith in the free market beyond everything else. It is this powerful erasure of the conflicts *innate* to this vision of development that is the best example of how strong the ideals of Europe work and how they are employed in varying purposes.

ii. Investment as a form of government

The anticipated changes came in December 2015 with the new Law on Agricultural Land, but the alteration that would allow the law to co-exist with the SAA was not made. Instead, under the demands for a new Law that would not be in conflict with the SAA, a completely new aspect was introduced: the translation of the preference for “investments” into the Law by a special directive/bylaw [*uredba*], signed by Prime Minister Vučić in June 2016. It stated that each municipality can lease up to 30% of land under its control to an “investor” outside the public auctions that usually regulate the lease of state-owned land.¹⁰⁴ The “investor” has to apply with an investment plan, which will be examined by specially formed Commission that will also have the power to rank applications in case of multiple

¹⁰⁰ Strsoglavec and Vukmirović, ‘Sporazum o stabilizaciji i pridruživanju [Stabilisation and Association Pact]’, 3.

¹⁰¹ Strsoglavec and Vukmirović, 3.

¹⁰² Strsoglavec and Vukmirović, 9. Emphasis added.

¹⁰³ For a discussion on the mismatch between CAP and the reality of Eastern European agriculture, see Gorton, Hubbard, and Hubbard, ‘The Folly of European Union Policy Transfer’; For a general overview of possible negative effects of liberalisation implied in Europeanisation, see Knezevic, ‘Free Markets for All’.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Uredba [Bylaw] 56/2016’.

applications.¹⁰⁵ The Commission is made up from three ministers: Finance, Agriculture and Environmental Protection,¹⁰⁶ and Economy, and two other members named by the Minister of Agriculture and Environmental Protection. The first meeting of the Commission was on January 11, 2017, and the first call for investment plans was announced in February 2017.¹⁰⁷ It stipulated the following criteria for investment plans: the investment of minimum 500,000EUR, the number of jobs created, contribution to increasing competitiveness [*konkurentnost*], contribution to export growth, contribution to local government development, and the place of the applicants' registration (unspecified as to how this will influence the evaluations).¹⁰⁸ But even with these recent clarifications, the Law was heavily criticized for "legalising corruption" by putting power in the hands of a small committee without clear guidelines, and thus hiding it behind a non-transparent evaluation process.

It was this focus on investment that drew most attention to the Law. In addition to the legislative changes, another intervention in the market came three years earlier with a bilateral agreement with United Arab Emirates (UAE) that allows big investments from UAE to bypass public tenders. The first controversy was the UAE investment in land in Vojvodina by the Al Rawafed company.¹⁰⁹ The Al Rawafed investment included more than 10,000ha of agricultural land: about 3,500ha was leased for 30 years from a military institution VU Morović, and the rest of the land was bought from previously socially owned enterprises Bačka, Jadran, Mladi borac, and Agrobačka.¹¹⁰ The deal was heavily contested by producers in the area who had leased the land in question before hand—a contentious claim that I will discuss later in the chapter. The details of the original deal, as well as its progress, were kept secret as issues of "special national importance." After legally requesting the information under the freedom of information right and waiting for over a year, only one investigative journalist project obtained the information that the lease has been underpaid—the state earning six times less than it would if it had continued to lease the land through

¹⁰⁵ Another relevant change was that small producers (who own less than 30ha of land and have registered production for more than three years) have the right to buy up to 20ha state owned land.

¹⁰⁶ Now the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy.

¹⁰⁷ 'Komisija Zaseda [Committee in Session]'.

¹⁰⁸ 'Otvoren Konkurs [Open Call]'.

¹⁰⁹ The cooperation started in 2012. All of the big investments are highly contentious. For an overview, see Bartlett et al., 'The UAE as an Emerging Actor in the Western Balkans'.

¹¹⁰ Gluščević, 'Obećali Veće Prinose i Profit, a Upropastili Karadorđevo [They Promised Higher Yields, but Ruined Karadorđevo]'.

public auctions.¹¹¹ It was around this time that the term land grabbing entered the discussion in Serbian land politics.

Land grabbing—a term that is used in relation with the global land rush and land acquisitions—points to the “current explosion of large scale (trans)national commercial land transactions” that started after the 2008 crisis.¹¹² The news of Serbian legislative changes arrived after Eastern Europe was recognized as another target of land-grabbing, and specific cases from Serbia were included in the report by one of the most prominent NGOs working on the issue.¹¹³ It is these issues that are discussed in relation to a very different program of modernising Serbian agriculture: foreign direct investment.

iii. Intervention as Foreign Direct Investment

During my fieldwork, another story of investment emerged. The 2015 Law on Agricultural Land was passed amid rumours of Tönnies, a giant German pork producer, entering the Serbian market with several farms that would need around 3000ha per farm to sustain production.¹¹⁴ This fit in with larger discourses of *investitori* [investors] around which Serbian progress has increasingly been framed. Many of my interlocutors interpreted the focus on investment as a departure from a policy that had hitherto (at least superficially) tried to encourage mid-size producers to expand—not even the emerging “middle class” of producers can produce an investment plan ready for the new Commission. Clearly, this focus on investment is crucial for understanding changes in Serbian agriculture, but where does this obsession with “investment” come from? And how does it work within the larger discourses about improving Serbian agriculture? The next section will highlight how it emerges within a broader project of modernisation and marketization as imagined in discourses of liberal peace and good governance.

The Prime Minister is very clear on the tools needed to develop Serbian agriculture: Serbia needs foreign direct investment that will bring both capital and superior knowledge needed to make Serbia the “granary of Europe” [*žitnica Evrope*] that it is supposed to be. The obsession with foreign direct investment is not limited to agriculture, but within land policy it has manifested in two major ways so far—first came the bilateral state agreement with the UAE and then came the changes in the 2015 Law on Agricultural Land and the subsequent

¹¹¹ Insajder, ‘Arapsko ulaganje u poljoprivredu’ [Arab investment in agriculture].

¹¹² Borras et al., ‘Towards a Better Understanding of Global Land Grabbing’.

¹¹³ Franco and Borras, ‘Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and People’s Struggles in Europe’.

¹¹⁴ Dragojlo and Rujević, ‘Strah i Nada Zbog Dolaska Tenisa [Fear and Hope around the Arrival of Tönnies]’.

directive that will enable investors to bypass public auctions of state land.¹¹⁵ As with land deals in general, the processes here include more than the transfer of tenure: there are also narratives of legitimation, subject making, technology transfer, and industrial development policy that shape these developments.¹¹⁶

As we will discuss below, the narratives of legitimation of foreign direct investment in Serbia depend on technological advancement, reforming the workforce stuck with socialist habits, good governance, and overall peace and stability. In these narratives, we see that there is a very different intervention happening in Serbian agriculture outside the EU accession. This intervention profoundly shapes both official politics and experiences of agricultural producers in Serbia. Moreover, even if conducted without specific policies implemented by the EU or INGOs, we uncover the life that the narratives of intervention take on outside their imagined fields of action: they are alive in the images of changing subjects and mentalities, promoting peace and stability, and effecting change through the working of the free market.

a. Narratives of legitimation: problems and solutions of Serbian land use

In this section, I go directly to public statements to analyse narratives of legitimation used for framing foreign direct investment as a practice of government in agriculture. These narratives, however, arrived to me not from the media, but from the many people I spoke to who critically reflected on them—in explaining their experiences, my interlocutors used these public narratives as a defining counter-position.¹¹⁷ Even though they did not frame them in these words, their constant reflection on what “they” (the media and the government) perceived as lacking and the real situation invited me to dig deeper into these framing devices.

Technological advancement is the most obvious framing of the transformation of agriculture. This is how Prime Minister Vučić answered an MP question about the Al Rawafed investment in July 2014:

“The Arabs will have four to five times more yields per hectare than we had—four to five times larger yields per hectare, believe it or not! I think this says enough, this will be a show case, this will be an exemplary good where you can come and see. Tell me, is there anyone among you who is not proud of how this looks today, and you

¹¹⁵ ‘Uredba [Bylaw] 56/2016’.

¹¹⁶ Wolford et al., *Governing Global Land Deals*, 3.

¹¹⁷ I interviewed 37 people formally in addition to attending events and noting informal conversations there.

will see how it will look in 2018! In one year, we will be able to fly to Chicago and New York on our planes... when you look at what we managed to do... yields will be increased four to five times!”¹¹⁸

In this statement, the modernity is painted as high yields and connection to the United States via flights that refer to another deal with the UAE—the privatisation of the national airline sold to Etihad Airways.¹¹⁹ It is in this progression towards modernity that foreign investors are needed. But the investment was not framed only as improving agriculture. In addition to modernising agriculture and improving governance, the Prime Minister frames many of these investments as a more general change in both individuals and in society—a true governmental aspiration. For example, after a visit to the headquarters of the German pork producer who is about to invest in Serbia, and who is considered by many to be the main reason for the changes in the 2015 Law, the Prime Minister spoke about how he expects that just the *presence* of Tönnies in Serbia will “change the *culture* of doing business.”¹²⁰ The reference to *changing culture* is similar to the discussions of the Twinning Project in the Ministry discussed already. This framing is in line with the usual discourse of the Serbian people, or the Balkans in general, not doing enough, not being hard working enough, and generally in need of “learning” of how to “really work.” In relation to the Tönnies, the Minister explained:

“So, our people have to learn, they have to know how the Germans do it, how they do it in the cleanliest possible way, in the best way, and why they are the most successful in Europe!”¹²¹

The sentiment is captured well in the most recent speech at an opening of another German factory:

“We live in a region where it is usually easy to talk, but it’s a lot harder to do something. Where words are cheap, and work and acting expensive, where criticism abounds, but responsibility is hard to find. Today, I am very happy that I can say that fulfilling promises and taking action and accepting responsibility definitely win, and,

¹¹⁸ This quote is from Prime Minister Vučić in a Parliamentary debate on the topic of UAE investments in Serbia. For a full transcript of his responses, see ‘Dokumenti Poslaničkih Pitanja u Julu [Documents of MPs’ Questions in July]’.

¹¹⁹ See Bartlett et al., ‘The UAE as an Emerging Actor in the Western Balkans’.

¹²⁰ ‘Vučić u Nemačkoj Sa Vlasnikom „Tenisa” [Vučić in Germany with Tönnies Owner]’.

¹²¹ *Vučić: Tenis Želi Da Ulaže u Srbiji* [Vučić: Tönnies Wants to Invest in Serbia].

in Serbia, they will have to keep on winning against laziness, shallowness, and, I would say, uncivility [*neučtivost*].”¹²²

So the cooperation between the government and the foreign investors, or “our dear friends” in the Prime Minister’s terminology, will bring about the *behavioural* change that is needed in the workforce: they will be more hard-working and more civil. It is the cooperation between the hard-working German investors and the brave decision of the current government that mean *taking action* and *accepting responsibility*—only such approach can deal with the Serbian *laziness, shallowness, and uncivility*.

The same speech takes it even further. The tone changed from deprecating the Serbian workforce by contrasting it to everything it will learn from its “German friends,” to one speaking to the investors themselves and celebrating the workers’ ability as the main “engine pulling Serbia along the road of progress.” Here, the Prime Minister employs concepts of peace and stability, thus drawing upon the narratives of risk but localizing them to utilize the ready-made image of the violent and war-prone Balkan subject:

“It is important that we preserve stability. And the choice between stability and instability is made every day. We live in a region where if you look away for just a moment, the whole train can slip from the tracks. Every action is sensitive, every decision has long term consequences. This is why I want to say that stability is something that we need to work on together. So I ask you, the workers, and everyone else, to help us do so. Arrogance doesn’t lead anywhere.”¹²³

The speech also includes an invitation to “his dear friends in Germany” to invite more of their own friends from Germany to invest in Serbia:

“I invite them to come and see how hard working the Serbian people are and how well we can work. That we always have a clear message that we want peace, that we want stability, that we want to work, and that we want more investments. As the President of the Government, I guarantee that nowhere, in none of the surrounding countries, can you get the conditions that you get in Serbia.”¹²⁴

More than a very literal illustration of the developmental race to the bottom, this speech illustrates that foreign direct investment is not legitimized only through quantitative economic calculations, but relies on the link between forms of government and the subjects

¹²² Vučić: *Novi Pogoni i Više Rađa* [Vučić: *New Factories and More Work*].

¹²³ Vučić: *Novi Pogoni i Više Rađa* [Vučić: *New Factories and More Work*].

¹²⁴ Vučić: *Novi Pogoni i Više Rađa* [Vučić: *New Factories and More Work*].

produced by them. It employs a governmental reason when it creates the link between personal self-improvement, neoliberalisation of working conditions, and national progress. But while it engages the governmental narrative of the “well-being of population,” the people whose transformation is imagined—the workers—are not imagined to be *empowered* by market rationalities but *contained* in menial underpaid jobs. This presents a puzzle both for discussions on what kind of government is promoted by liberal interventions, but also for governmentality as a framework focusing on productive power. But before further exploring these tensions in the next chapter, I want to focus on a particular form of subjectivity that initially brought land to my attention: the people resisting changes in agricultural land use.

IV What makes resistance?

FDI in agriculture is always discussed in relation with the contested land needed as a basis for these projects. Land emerged in the narratives of people experiencing the changing agricultural governance as a field of contestation—a field in which *how* and *how much* to govern was debated, refuted, and even violently asserted. Here, like in Chapter 4, I use resistance not as an expression of local authenticity nor as a something exterior to power. I see it as crucial for understanding forms of rule in general. In following these debates on land politics, my attention moved away from the technical assistance and capacity building in Belgrade and was drawn to protests and debates around land policy changes.

The resistance mounted against the changing landscape of land policy in Serbia was loud and varied. I have heuristically divided it into four different logics of resistance. The first was made up of producers and policy makers who identified themselves as believing in the free market *and* their abilities to successfully compete in it. They saw the changes in the Law, the bilateral agreement with the UAE, and the investments that were done through them as distorting the free market and thus precluding their fair participation in it. The second group is the broadly defined radical right who argue that the government is ceding sovereignty by not retaining land ownership within national citizenship boundaries. They are present in the media, but also in the Parliament in parties like Dveri. The third group are the owners of previous social and state cooperatives [*zadruga*] who argue that the sale of land is illegal because it violates their rights to *private property*. In a nutshell, they argue against the way that land was distributed in the transition period when socially owned land was put in state ownership and then privatised. They contend that social ownership implied their private ownership as well and thus privatisation was actually stealing their property. Lastly, there is a small dispersed group of those invoking the ideals of food sovereignty.

What makes these stories of resistance interesting is their incompatibility with easy narratives of what is local and global. Food sovereignty is a unique concept briefly defined as “a collective right of peoples to produce their own food in their own territory.”¹²⁵ It is interesting not only because its holistic vision of food production stands in stark contrast with the contemporary globalised industrial food system, but also because it was developed across scales and has local goals with inevitably global visions.¹²⁶ The insistence of the cooperative associations on their rights as holders of *private property* sits uneasily with the stories of romantic local Yugoslav social ownership against capitalist expansion and private ownership.¹²⁷ The radical right groups here employ much of the anti-imperialist rhetoric employed by the global left, and the belief in the free market makes it difficult to celebrate this resistance as a local counter-narrative to global capitalist order. Here, I will use the example of the resistance gathered around the idea of the free market to better illustrate some of these issues.

i. Resisting FDI in offices

The individuals who designed the 2006 Law now work in a consultant firm based in Belgrade and service clients all over the world. When I met them, they were finishing an analysis for a company considering investment in Mozambique, and they were getting ready to travel to Georgia as a part of an expert team providing the same assistance along the path of “transition” that Serbia received before getting EU candidate country status. At the end of my meeting with Mladen who designed the 2006 law around his “faith in the free market,” I was completely taken aback by his advice on the direction my study should take. Once I had made it clear that I plan on researching the current transformations in land ownership, he brought up *land grabbing* (used in English) as a concept I should utilize. I was surprised—a minute ago he was recommending me to read *The Great Rebirth: Lessons from the Victory of Capitalism over Communism*. The book was just translated by the Belgrade Libertarian Club and argues that the most successful transitions were led by “bold” privatisations and deregulation—precisely the things that the literature and social movements blame for causing the land rush in the first place.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Dunford, ‘Peasant Activism and the Rise of Food Sovereignty’, 1.

¹²⁶ For more on these dynamics, see Dunford, *The Politics of Transnational Peasant Struggle*.

¹²⁷ Interestingly, these associations were not the subject of any of the vast civil society building in the country despite their size and relevance for rural areas. For example, the Association of Small Shareholders of Vojvodina [*Udruženje malih akcionara Vojvodine*] represents about 50,000 people who used to have shares in big state enterprises which were then automatically sold by the state in the process privatisation

¹²⁸ Åslund and Djankov, *The Great Rebirth*.

I was admittedly confused: Mladen definitely did not belong to the transnational left like the organisations who published the biggest reports on land grabbing, nor did he champion the smallholders as the usual stories of resistance to land grabbing do.¹²⁹ He focused on a quite different aspect of the land grab: its distortion of the free land market that *he* designed to help Serbian mid-size producers. Here, we see the very diverse use of the free market. Critics of land grabbing accuse the free market of commodifying land (both in the market, but also more literally by creating cadastres, registering tenure, and delineating parcels) and thus setting the stage for the contemporary land rush. Mladen and his colleagues, on the other hand, see the land grabs practices as a distortion of the free market and see a well-functioning market as protection against land grabbing.

Beyond the seeming ideological contradictions, Mladen started telling me about his own work as a consultant. The analysis for the investment client in Mozambique he had just finished was more comprehensive and cheaper than anything available internationally. It was clearly a great source of pride, but it also struck me as idiosyncratic—these analyses are used to identify the so called “yield gaps,” the difference between the potential production of land and its current use. These “yield gaps” effectively create *the object* of investment as development: once an area is identified as under-utilized, investors move in to buy land and exploit its full potential. Like in Serbia, investments are then legitimized by a narrative which paints a picture of “backwardness” to be redeemed by (foreign) capital. So, while condemning the changes in Serbian land policy as land grabbing, Mladen was proud of his part in facilitating another, probably much bigger, land grab in Mozambique. I left the long day with Mladen with his sentence echoing in my ears: “There is no more ideology here, you understand that?”

ii. Resisting FDI in the fields

I want to retell a story of one “good” mid-size farmer who led the resistance to the Al Rawafed acquisition to highlight the crucial question of who has the power to resist, and what voices we are resurrecting when we seek to engage local subjectivities. Milenko leased the land that Al Rawafed is leasing now under the bilateral agreement with the UAE, and his family is rich enough to have tried to buy the 2000ha that have been sold to Al Rawafed.

Milenko is well connected with the State Government in Belgrade and the Provincial Government in Novi Sad, so he received a map with the location of all land parcels that were designated for the investment even before the news was public. He mobilized 84 people who

¹²⁹ For this interpretation, see the report on Serbia in the big TNI report Srećković, ‘The Case of Serbia’.

were currently leasing that land. From speaking to other people involved in smaller and less publicized instances of resistance to investments I realise this was a usual practice: those who have the most to lose, the big producers, invite (or order) smaller producers to join the protest and thus give it legitimacy. They met and signed a contract of “collective responsibility” that was supposed to protect them from individual persecution. However, the State Information Agency (*BIA—Bezbedonosno-informativna agencija*) began inviting people for interviews, and people slowly removed themselves from the collective. 40 people remained, and they were “handled” by the local police for “working against the interests of the state.” This was much easier for Milenko because his social capital in the area made local police a lot more “manageable” and they continued to protest. However, Al Rawafed representatives soon offered these people to work the land for them, since they had delays in getting machinery into Serbia. Milenko was furious—he told everyone that they are crazy for accepting the deal—the deal would help them go through a year, but what about the future without any land to lease?

After the deal, only 10 people remained in the group. And with the support dwindling and the pressures from BIA persisting, Milenko himself accepted the deal and started working for Al Rawafed. However, he still retells the story as one of insult, rather than an opportunity: in a mix of anger and pride, he told me that even though he now works only 700ha of wheat for Al Rawafed, that year he finished all 8500ha in *only* 54 days—not even the most advanced farmers in Europe could do it that quickly! Milenko knows that his accepting the deal angered and surprised people, but his own explanation was different: “I was not fighting with the Arabs, I blame and I was hurt by my state!” By conceding to the investment, Milenko was made to construct another narrative that would maintain his view of himself, to preserve the coherence of him protesting Al Rawafed and then working for them. He echoed the resentment throughout the conversation:

“The chief agronomist comes to me to talk about growing—he is from Israel and does not know everything about the climate here. How is it possible then that they ‘had to come’ because we were not capable of working the land? We were very much capable, just let us do it!”

Milenko seems to be happy with the cooperation since he is still working on a part of their land. But the conversation I had with him, or the fact that he agreed to meet and narrate the story in great detail, shows that he still held resentment he wanted to share. Throughout the interview, he threw numbers at me that proved that the promise of a “fivefold increase

in yields”¹³⁰ did not happen. The project was legitimized by a reference to the backwardness of Serbian agriculture, and Milenko worked hard to prove to the world, myself included, that such a view is unjustified. Farmers *like him* are not backward—they can compete, they can use the same agro-industrial techniques, but they need to be recognized by the state as being able to do so.

The fact that Milenko blamed the state specifically, rather than Al Rawafed, I think is more than just a tool needed for him to reconcile his actions. It shows an expectation of the state, a reliance on the state even in the narratives of free market.¹³¹ Milenko was concerned with proving himself as a subject capable of functioning in the free market. He was clearly concerned with placing himself on the right side of the civilisational dualism that posits the ability to compete in the free (global) market as a characteristic of modernity, but it is his own state that had refused him the recognition. Most importantly, in a narrative in which he posits his *ability* to work as hard and as good as those foreign and modern as a defence against land acquisitions, Milenko is also simultaneously rendering those who are not able to have the newest technology and corresponding yields as *open targets* for those same land acquisitions. Thus, the image of backwardness does not serve to only justify intervention, but also to naturalise both old and new inequalities.

Milenko also had a specific vision of development that Al Rawafed did not fit within. He told me a story of the village “coming back to life” in the last decade as producers were able to expand. And he emphasised that his own success is nothing without the success of the village—he might be able to afford football lessons for his son, but what if his son has to travel to Novi Sad or Belgrade to play because he has no playmates left in the village? Such holistic vision of local and community development was a powerful image, but it was soon dispelled. At the end of the conversation, I asked Milenko how much money he lost with Al Rawafed coming to his village. We had spent the last two hours talking about the deal and he was visibly upset so I automatically assumed a large sum. He looked at me reluctantly:

¹³⁰ This refers to promises of yield increases made by Prime Minister Vučić in a Parliamentary debate on the topic of UAE investments in Serbia. For a full transcript of his responses, see ‘Dokumenti Poslaničkih Pitanja u Julu [Documents of MPs’ Questions in July]’.

¹³¹ A further discussion on various invocations of the state remains outside of the scope of the thesis, but it is worth mentioning that while politics in general and the state are used as insults, there is also a wide-spread expectation of the state as the provider of basic protections. In many discussions, this expectation is interpreted as “socialist mentality,” but I agree with authors like Rajković in that it presents a much more interesting process of re-conceptualising the state in line with global capitalism. For more on this relation to the state, see Rajković, ‘Concern for the State’; Mikuš and Dokić, ‘Nobody’s Stronger Than the State’.

“To be honest, I didn’t lose much, I just squeezed out the really small ones [producers who lease smaller plots in state ownership].”

Instead of seeing incoherence in Milenko’s view of development, I think the story points to the silences in the teleological narratives of agriculture we are offered: if we are determined to develop a “middle class” of producers, where do the smaller ones go?¹³² Here, we once again see the division between the “small” and the “big” —just like in the previous part of the chapter that discussed EU and FAO projects. It is this division *within* targets of interventions that forms the basis of Milenko’s story and that is uncovered with the methodology practiced in this thesis. But before expanding on this, it is worth highlighting another dividing line that was used to make sense of land politics in Serbia.

iii. Resisting FDI in party politics

While I might have been surprised by talking to farmers and encountering their instrumentalisation of the free market narrative, I was less surprised to hear it in “Dosta je bilo [DJB—It’s enough!]: a technocratic, urban libertarian party that entered the Parliament in 2016. DJB loudly opposed the new Law on Agricultural Land since its beginning, and openly described it as “encouraging land grabbing” as early as September 2015.¹³³ Hoping to find out more, I arranged a meeting with Sanja, who was in the Vojvodina Assembly and who has written extensively on issues of land and agriculture on the DJB website.

When Sanja was introducing me to the concept of land grabbing, she emphasised that this concept is not usually used in this region, it is reserved for “black countries” [*crnačke zemlje*]. She was referring to a racial description of African countries in which the biggest land grabs happen, and Serbia is “definitely not one of them.” Such a common-sense reliance on a racial binary as an explanation shocked me, but its implications are more reaching than everyday racism. It showcases the disparities between geographies in which Serbia is located in Europe, and development indicators which put it firmly on the wanting side of foreign direct investment. Sanja is strongly attached to the dream of development, to the dream of belonging—preserving that attachment when faced with exclusion from the EU and

¹³² My project remains silent about the everyday effects of these policies on small-scale and (semi-)subsistence farmers. While I heard rumours of raising lease prices, the focus of my fieldwork on articulated resistance led to silencing those without the power to speak up. A more traditional ethnography, as opposed to the multi-sited political ethnography pursued here, might correct this omission.

¹³³ Kozić, ‘Отимање Земље и Како Се Одбранити [Land Grabbing and Ways of Defending]’.

processes that are more similar to the Global South than North requires a complex process of negotiating one's own subjectivity.

And while Sanja's racial depiction of this division line was startling, throughout my fieldwork I was faced with similar cartographies. In lectures, presenters would demonstrate the severity of indicators by stating that they resemble Senegal or Mozambique as countries that Serbia should not be associated with. When explaining the migrant crisis that was raging along the Balkan route during my stay in Belgrade, people drew distinct lines between "us" as white and still Christian refugees, and "them" as non-white, Islam subjects. In a way, the Balkan subject is at the same time considered as a part of Europe—i.e. not a part of the black/underdeveloped/non-Christian outside, *and* as needing help, knowledge, and guidance to become or return to this fully European status. Just as Milenko differentiated between him who *deserves* land, from those *smaller ones* who are permitted to be squeezed out of the land market, here we see how dividing lines naturalise the inequalities inevitable in processes of transformation. Importantly, this image was not presented to me by stereotyping foreigners nor just by self-exoticizing locals—it was everywhere and it underlined policies, behaviours, and wildly varying narratives. In short, while I sought to engage with local subjects on their experiences of intervention, I was faced with a much more complicated idea of the local subject that cannot be fully appreciated without considering its place in the global imaginary.

V Engaging experience, complicating subjects

A complicated negotiation of subjectivity happens when individuals are tasked with living the everyday of global (and European) inequality: how does Mladen remain so emotionally attached to land in Vojvodina while at the same time facilitating a (probably much bigger) land grab in Mozambique? How does Milenko expect his village to develop when he compensates for the land lost to Al Rawafed by taking land from smaller producers? How does Sanja preserve the distinction between "us" in Europe and "them" in the Global South even though Serbia is having to learn from the land grabbing experiences of the Global South, and is continually excluded from "Europe proper"? I am reluctant to call their positions incoherent—incoherence implies irrelevance. And it is often by innocent casting as irrelevance, rather than malicious silencing, that subjectivities and experiences disappear from accounts of interventions. I think they point to larger questions of the groundwork necessary to wed individual subjectivities to global dreams of empowerment and modernisation.

This negotiation happens firmly within the global geopolitical hierarchy of North/South and East/West: this is why Milenko uses the free market to defend his right to land—it is not the division line that is wrong, but his positioning on the wrong side of it. This is why Mladen can continue his consultancy while opposing the local land grabs—because he does not mind the idea that some land is underused and therefore those living there do not have the right to claim it, but he is worried about being put on the wrong side of that divide. And indeed, within governmentality studies that discuss how freer, more consuming, and more enterprising we are led to become one question that remains unexplored is why are we not all already the same? This lack of attention to the side that is not being empowered is not just an empirical blind eye—it prompts more fundamental questions about experiences made in the interstices of the local and the global.

While people like Sanja, Mladen, and Milenko loudly positioned Serbia on the winning side of this global division line, these narratives also mix with yearnings for progress that imagine the transformation of local subjects in line with modern ideals. In the cases explored earlier in the chapter, as well as Vučić narratives in the previous section, the faulty Balkans subjects are imagined as improvable—they need to “learn” to be modern. In the narrative of FDI, the learning is done by participating in neoliberalised labour and land markets—in a way, the labour relation itself becomes a practice of subject reshaping and people are expected to enthusiastically embrace low wages and deteriorating working conditions as self-improvement. This is a narrative of etho-politics that shifts the responsibility for failed transition to the workers themselves.¹³⁴ However, to make sense of this, we ought to further highlight its very clear *civilisational* goal. As Ivan Rajković reminds us, while ideas of Protestant work ethic are by now usually understood as Eurocentric and problematic, they still serve as powerful tools.¹³⁵

This productive power of the techniques governing personal work have already been examined in studies of post-socialism. In studying transition on the factory floor in Poland, Elizabeth Dunn detailed how “technical practices like auditing, accounting, quality control, and niche marketing” go far beyond just facilitating production and trade:

“they carry along new models of social relations and encapsulate notions of what it means to be a person, installing them in a post-socialist environment is also, at root,

¹³⁴ For these arguments, see Rajković, ‘Commodification from Below’; Apostolov, ‘Etho-Politics in Serbia’.

¹³⁵ Rajković, ‘Commodification from Below’.

an attempt to make fundamental changes in the cultural notions that underpin economy and society.”¹³⁶

In this way, Dunn’s thesis is a summation of governmentality studies and an explanation of their specific power in post-socialist spaces. Through specific techniques in the work place, the actual workers are being transformed. Vučić’s hopes of learning to do business differently follow the same logic.

Even though Dunn’s interpretation is useful for explaining the connection imagined between foreign direct investment and the changes in subjectivities that it is supposed to bring, it must be noted that the freedom on the factory floor is a very different freedom than that of a successful farmer. In discussing factory workers, Dunn adds an important emphasis on the fact that “free” choices are often made in situations where the only alternative is economic disaster—and it is the image of disaster that was retold to me far more times than the image of prospering entrepreneurial farmers.¹³⁷ In official narratives, the disaster is hidden in terms like “natural death,” “consolidation,” “cleansing statistics.” It is hidden in the death, in those who disappear in consolidation, and those who are cleansed to make room for statistics closer to EU averages. And for many small producers, it is barely avoided by being employed by a German pork producer or as a labourer on land which they previously leased themselves. As with EU projects that seek to activate *specific* subjects while relegating others to financial ruin, so do narratives of FDI demonstrate the way that progress as a rationality of government depends on demarcating those who will be empowered and taught to use market rationality to demand more, and those who will be silenced and instructed to use market rationality to make peace with wages that are far from able to provide for a family.

One of the strengths of studying agriculture is that its materiality serves well to challenge such veneers. This struck me most as I was driving and conducting an unexpected interview with a semi-subsistence producer who needed a ride from a factory where he was employed on minimum wage, to his home where he was about to continue working on his land.¹³⁸ We were driving through tiny Vojvodina villages—famous for their “along the road” long design and characteristic houses. As he tried to explain to me what he perceived as changes in Serbian agriculture, he invited me to imagine just one big field that stretches across Vojvodina and is worked by high-tech machines connected to the Internet and fed

¹³⁶ Dunn, *Privatizing Poland*, 163.

¹³⁷ Dunn, 167.

¹³⁸ Fieldwork journal, October 17, 2016.

data by drones. As I just emerged from studying the land consolidation efforts, the diagnosis of backwardness in relation to small parcels, and the prophetic documents promising high-tech development, I laughed instinctively at the image that I thought would satisfy those policy makers. Yet my passenger remained unsmiling—the big field means no small villages, and the high-tech machinery means no people. It is this image that captures the things hidden by the euphemism “cleansing of statistics” and it is this image that sits uneasily with studying power as always productive, enhancing, and concerned with well-being.

Conclusions

The Chapter explored experiences of those targeted by different interventions that seek to modernise Serbian agriculture. The first part of the chapter provided a short historical overview that showed how the government of agriculture reflected the ongoing political, ideological, social, and economic projects. It was presented as both a *goal* of these projects—as is the case with solving the problem of “agricultural overpopulation” that was a mark of underdevelopment, and as a *tool* of these projects—as is the case with setting up cooperatives in the villages that were supposed to transform peasants themselves.

This section showed the potentials of taking agriculture as a field in which to examine both rationalities and experiences of government. Moreover, it brought to the fore the fact that agricultural government was always made in the intersection of the local and the international—the positioning of Yugoslav policies between market ideas, Soviet influence, and yearnings for development illustrate this well. As the next Chapter will show, it is this layering that we need to appreciate better if we are to discuss how local experiences are made by different projects that seek to build development and progress.

The next section took on this experiential approach and focused on subjectivities of agricultural government in Serbia in two ways: how these subjectivities are imagined in *practices* of government, and the *effects* as experienced by these subjectivities. First, it presented EU accession as a practice of intervention that seeks to transform peasants, public sector employees, and the civil society. In doing so, it did not only point to the rationalities of these techniques, but also to their effects that far surpass their intended fields of action. Second, following the experiences of people targeted by these EU policies, the chapter turned to another field that makes the lived reality of agricultural government in Serbia and is crucial for the programme of transforming agriculture, but is removed from EU’s *acquis*. By investigating the field of land management, how it is imagined, what subjects populate it, and the experiences of those contesting the changes, this last section showed the radical

openings that are brought about by a methodological and analytical focus on subjectivities of the targets.

The chapter makes three observations, but instead of treating them as closure, they lead to question that will be explored in the following chapter. First of all, the ethnographic inquiry into experiences of EU intervention showed that practices that are supposed to target subjects—whether they are civil servants, producers, or civil society—have a much wider effect than assumed in the success/failure view of intervention. Training in the public sector fails because people quit, but this helps create the much broader field of consultancies and INGOs that employ them. Targeting civil society additionally helps this peculiar political economy: projects are well funded and the relationship between the state and civil society is formalised. Thus, the everyday experience of intervention as EU accession in agriculture points to the myriad of ways in which intervention does not only target subjects but creates a much wider field of political economy of projects and civil society, and in turn re-conceptualises both the state and the civil society. Even though these issues that point to wider structural changes are usually not a concern of governmentality studies, this chapter showed that without them we cannot understand experience *and* its connection to forms of rule.

Secondly, when thinking about targeting producers—whether by EU projects or investment laws—I was continuously faced with firmly drawn division lines. The narratives of empowerment, activation, and entrepreneurship are present and strong, but they move along with narratives of death, disappearance, and silence. In the specific investment narrative above, as well as in the agricultural governance in general, the governmental ideals are obvious. Progress is imagined as a difficult-to-achieve state of hard-working farmers swiftly and efficiently responding to the world food market to bring Serbia, and its people, progress on par with life in the West. Yet the practices prescribed are very different: besides the entrepreneurial workshops, NGO trainings, and small-scale development projects, we see this same narrative used to justify a vision of progress through foreign direct investment, in which subjects are not supposed to “think outside of the box” or “become leaders.” On the contrary, they have to accept their reality of working for less than 200 euros a month as the most economically rational decision available. Focusing on government through freedom and power as always “productive” limits the way we can understand these very different realities of the same project. There are obviously those whose land is taken away and are silenced, and those who are expected to disappear. Thinking them together will animate the discussion in the next Chapter.

Third, in following the experiences that were presented to me in fieldwork, I was led to a policy field that was initially imagined as separated from narratives of intervention. Land policy is seemingly outside the EU's influence and my own decision to follow it was underpinned by an uneasiness about the strained connection between land policy and the conceptual limitations of *international intervention*. As I heard so many times, the EU does *not* interfere in land policy. Yet, the more I inquired in it, the more I saw it as another field targeted for transformation: the ideals of CAP fitted agricultural production are not accomplished only through EU's practices and legislation, but they are employed by the Serbian state and global elites to narrate a road to progress through land investment. Here we observe a form of government created in the encounter between projects that seamlessly weave local and international dynamics. The discourses of good governance, transparency, peace and stability, are plucked from global narratives and *actively* put to work in very specific contexts. But the images of underdeveloped peasants, backward technologies, and the *need* for a subjective transformation are as local as they are international.

More generally, the chapter destabilised the categories which orient research on interventions. In search of "grassroots," we are faced with a much more complicated class stratification of Serbian producers. In search of local, we are faced with claims to a universal liberal idea of private property that comes out of specific local history. While expecting a "global" land rush, we are faced with the state assuming the key role for enabling FDIs. And in efforts to learn *from* the analysis of targets of intervention, we are faced with "casual" racism that draws the lines between those worth keeping their land, and those not developed enough to earn this. In short, the frames and programs used in the government of both agriculture and land in Serbia show that governmental ideals are very much alive around the world, but they are often employed internally—within Serbia and within specific communities—to a point of destabilising the usual dichotomy of interveners and those intervened upon. With lines between freedom and constraint blurred, it becomes difficult to differentiate between *intervention* and government as usual. And it is precisely these tensions that will be the topic of the next chapter.

Part III

Chapter 6

Dislocating Interventions

Part I of the thesis set out the problem and presented an ethnographic understanding of governmentality as an appropriate tool for exploring experiences of those targeted by interventions. Part II put those lessons into empirical practice by exploring how youth experience non-formal youth education, how narratives of modernisation unfold in agricultural governance, and how different subjects conceptualise their political actions alongside these narratives. In doing so, the thesis uncovered a series of *disruptions* — “gap[s] between the chaotic ‘common sense’ of lived realities and the schemes [the ethnographer] must apply in seeking to make sense of them.”¹ My expectations formed in conversation with literature on governmentality and intervention were disrupted by lived experiences that could not be contained in their categories. This chapter uses these disruptions to draw out insights on interventions, forms of rule, and our ways of studying them.

The chapter proceeds in three parts. The first part highlights the disruptions that emerged from Part II. It will first emphasise how representations *matter* by putting observations from Part II in conversation with literature on coloniality of power and colonial difference. It will build onto this conversation by complicating the constitutive concepts used in the thesis. Instead of one *homo oeconomicus* found in governmentality studies, it will uncover a multiplicity of subject positions created through defining and naturalising difference. Instead of liberal power that is nurturing and productive, it will bring into view forms of power that govern through more than freedom. And finally, it will emphasise the dangers of working within the fields of visibility prescribed by interventions themselves.

The second part of the chapter will draw out some analytical and methodological issues from these observations. It will address two specific debates: the tension between critiques that start from experiences and those that start from structure; and the understanding of liberalism as something *present* in some spaces, and simply *absent* from others. Through a conversation on scale, this part of the chapter will show how we can think beyond this conundrum of experience/structure. Moreover, it will show how this new view of scale can help us rethink the dichotomy of liberal/illiberal intervention and power.

¹ Li, *Land's End*, 5.

The last part of the chapter will conclude by arguing that to engage subjectivities targeted by interventions and learn from them, we have to dislocate the concept of intervention itself. I will argue that we have to focus on connections *beyond* the intervention itself and study instead *politics of improvement*. Approaching projects of improvement through a focus on effects, programs, and practices as encountered by my interlocutors, moves beyond *intervention* in two ways: it locates subjects beyond the local/international binary; and it studies the coevalness of spaces and processes.

I Disruptions: Beyond governmentality and intervention

The narrative of creating subjects through micro-practices of projects that nurture freedom uncovered how governmental ideals of entrepreneurialism, freedom, individualism, and competition guide interventions in Serbia. However, the ethnographic approach advocated in Chapter 2 also led to disruptions—things that cannot be subsumed to a story about practices that govern self-conduct. Highlighting these observations in this section has two purposes. First, it showcases the potential of the methodology presented in Chapter 2. And second, it suggests that concepts such as governmentality can be useful even when they lead to observations that are not easily subsumed by them. Namely, governmentality as a narration of programs, effects, and practices of government uncovers much more than the homogenous *homo oeconomicus* produced by neoliberalism. In this case, it uncovered rationalities beyond neoliberalism, subjects that do not fit the *homo oeconomicus* label, and fields of visibility wider than those presented in project documents.

i. Representations that matter—the rule of difference in the Balkans

It has become common sense to say that interventions create their subjects as they describe them.² A defining feature of this encounter is the asymmetry of power between the tutor and the tutee.³ In projects of government, these images are the defining part of their programs, yet governmentality has been extensively critiqued for not being able to take into consideration this quintessential asymmetry.⁴ If we are to focus on subjectivities by using governmentality as I have, it is crucial to put governmentality studies in conversation with

² Doty, *Imperial Encounters*; Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*; Escobar, *Encountering Development*. This was discussed in Chapter 1.

³ For a genealogical study of this relationship in international politics and the field of intervention, see the unpublished PhD thesis by Motomichi Igarashi, 'Genealogical Analysis of the Dispositive of Humanitarianism/Trusteeship'.

⁴ In terms of international politics, this usually refers to the difference of (neo)liberal government supposedly developing endogenously in "developed" countries and being imposed on the rest. Sabaratnam refers to this as "exteriority of power" in the Global South. Sabaratnam, 'Avatars of Eurocentrism', 266.

bodies of literature more equipped to deal with theorisations and explorations of hierarchy. Without it, we cannot locate the subjects of interventions in their situated positions.

Building onto Sabaratnam's interpretation of intervention as animated by the colonality of power and colonial difference, this section will argue that these concepts are useful tools for studying programs, practices, and effects of power. Drawing on Robbie Shilliam, she defines colonality of power as the "hierarchical, structured bifurcation of Western and non-Western subjects central to modernity."⁵ And while the Balkans and the people I worked with in my fieldwork are not subjects of colonial power, this work on *coloniality of power* as the enunciation of difference and the normalisation of different subject-power relations is crucial for understanding how experiences are made.

In scholarship on the Balkans, this difference has been articulated in multiple ways. Attila Melegh calls it the East-West slope—a civilisational slope of according value based on the perceived closeness to a liberal utopia imagined to be Western Europe.⁶ József Böröcz invites us to consider the "moral geopolitics" that structure the spaces *within* Europe. This rule of *European difference* ties European goodness "to specific location in the north and the west of the continent," while the east and the south perform a function similar to the ones of colonial difference. This normalises a way of thinking that sees the East of the continent "catching up" with the goodness of its Western counterpart *only* if the Western counterpart extends *its* geopolitical influence over it.⁷ Manuela Boatcă similarly considers Eastern Europe as a space that never experienced formal colonisation but has and continues to be profoundly shaped by unequal and exploitative relationships with geopolitical power centres. She invites us to consider the work of *imperial difference*—"the less overtly racial, more pronounced ethnic, and distinct class hierarchies" which account for the relations between European Empires and their former subjects. Boatcă thus places the Balkans in *epigonal Europe* that is in a semi-peripheral position to Europe proper.⁸

No matter how it is termed, this articulation of difference is crucial for governmentalisation: without an acceptance of its hierarchies as common-sense, attachment to such projects would be impossible. The hierarchy, however, is rarely explicitly discussed

⁵ Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*, 137; Shilliam, 'What the Haitian Revolution Might Tell Us'.

⁶ Melegh, *On the East-West Slope*.

⁷ Böröcz, 'Goodness Is Elsewhere', 130–31.

⁸ Boatcă, 'The Quasi-Europes', 134. Outside of post-colonial and decolonial thought, this tutelage that does not depend on coercion, but subject formation, has been described as a "leveraged pedagogy." Kulpa, 'Western *Leveraged Pedagogy* of Central and Eastern Europe'.

or specifically examined within governmentality studies, even though the main strength of governmentality is precisely putting together the formation of subjectivities and forms of rule. This omission leads to already discussed criticisms that focus on the lack of power/politics and external legitimacy.⁹

Other than pointing to how the Balkans are created through the enunciation of difference, the concepts of coloniality and colonial difference can also be useful in emphasising another point without which interventions cannot be understood—namely, transcending the division of the social world into politics, economics, and culture as different spheres. This division has been noted widely. Ramón Grosfoguel, for example, presents coloniality of power and colonial difference as concepts able to transcend the debate between world system analysis that focuses on “the endless accumulation of capital on a world scale,” and post-colonial approaches that take culture as their primary object of critique.¹⁰ I pursue this project further.

Governmentality approaches in general have emphasised the very *subjective* dimension of neoliberal government and stayed away from considering material inequalities that might be structuring the governmentalisation process. And while this critique is now common, the solution is still imagined in a choice of what Merlingen refers to as “two modes of empirically exploring the arts of global governance” — one, termed poststructuralist, that would focus on discursive workings of neoliberalism, and the other, termed historical materialist, that would focus on the material effects of capitalism.¹¹

Introducing this variety to governmentality studies and getting rid of any illusions of faithfulness is a welcome development, but an insistence on an either/or choice can occlude the very intimate connections between the two. Again, starting from experiences of those who are supposed to be benefiting from practices of intervention can usefully push us towards considering *both* cultural/subjective and economic/structural inequalities that underwrite the experiences at hand.¹² The importance of considering the co-constitution of

⁹ Walters, *Governmentality*, 72–74; Walters, ‘The Microphysics of Power Redux’, 61; Allen and Goddard, ‘The Domestication of Foucault’; Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism’, 265. This leads some to combine governmentality insights with other perspectives that are better equipped with teasing apart the power of pedagogy – like Gramscian approaches that are used alongside governmentality. For some examples of Gramscian thought used alongside governmentality, see Li, *The Will to Improve*, 22–27; Joseph, *Social in the Global*, 41–43; Kurki, *Democratic Futures*.

¹⁰ Grosfoguel, ‘Colonial Difference’, 214.

¹¹ Merlingen, ‘Two Modes’.

¹² It is worth noting that an emerging field of Cultural Political Economy similarly focuses on this intersection of culture and capitalism. However, while CPE aims most simply to bring in culture to discussions of capitalism,

these two dimensions is what I will address next. However, even though the point here is about the necessity of not separating these spheres, this section remains trapped in precisely such vocabulary. Until we develop a new radical vocabulary that would transcend the divisions between the cultural, political, and economic realms,¹³ it is useful to consider different dimensions of colonial difference that are at play here.

I further divide the colonial difference into considerations of material and representational hierarchies—one drawing on political economy of EU's borderland, and the other on cultural Balkanism that has moved from an external image to an internal structure of self-identification. Material inequalities structure the intervention itself—reasons to intervene and to invite intervention are always supported by numerous benchmarks that describe underdevelopment, imperfect democratic processes, and potential for conflict. These hierarchies however, are not just discourses that create the targets of intervention, but they are also material circumstances that affect the lives of subjects within and beyond the intervention.

Agriculture works in a highly segregated field of political economy. While the intricacies of CAP remain outside of the scope of the thesis, it is important to note that EU policies are incredibly protectionist of EU agriculture and make it impossible for Serbia to compete from the outside.¹⁴ However, even after eventual accession, Serbia will remain in a specific subordinate position: faced with participating in a single market with developed industrial agriculture that is governed by decisions in Brussels (in which Serbia is not likely to participate). While the dream of “catching up” seems to frame development policies, there is no illusion about the impossibility of such progress. The realities of subjects might very well be determined by practices which make them active civil servants, entrepreneurial farmers, or liberal functional NGOs—practices that seemingly work to “modernise” the world into a homogenous whole. But the reality is also determined by the political economy of agricultural production on the periphery, oriented towards foreign direct investment based not on entrepreneurial freedoms, but on cheap labour.

this thesis aims to bring the analysis of culture, politics, and capitalism together through a focus on lived experience. For examples of works in CPE, see Sum and Jessop, *Towards a Cultural Political Economy*.

¹³ Grosfoguel, ‘Colonial Difference’, 216; Grosfoguel here draws on the discussion in Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science*.

¹⁴ Specifically, Serbian producers compete on the free market with EU producers even though EU agriculture has multiple advantages: bigger plot sizes, higher and more regular subsidies, higher capital investment and thus technological advancement. This was repeated to me by producers, big and small, academics, and policy makers. For more detail, refer to literature discussed in Chapter 5.

In non-formal youth education, it becomes quickly visible that the attraction of these workshops cannot be explained without intra- and inter-state inequalities. Positioned on the European periphery, the young people I spoke to had two primary reasons for participating in non-formal youth education. They wanted to better themselves and their CVs in search of employment—in a situation where youth unemployment rate is estimated at 50%, this employment is increasingly outside of Serbia.¹⁵ Further, they wanted to use the opportunity to travel for free in a region where travel is restricted by both a lack of disposable income and visa regimes. Reducing these very material facts to discourse of subjectivation would be both unfair and analytically limiting.

This inequality is supported by a hierarchical representational ranking of subjects. In this part of Europe, the powerful narratives that frame thought and practice have been well researched in the studies of Balkanism, but this thesis seeks to emphasise how these narratives have a life *beyond* the narratives of Western NGO's and EU's offices—they become permanent social structures around which subjects orient themselves and cannot be separated from the very material inequalities that they are a part of. So instead of just asking how these hierarchies inspire intervention discursively, something that has moved to a status of truism in intervention scholarship, this thesis asks what kind of life these images—“developed” and “developing”, or “modern” and “backward” —have beyond the intervention itself. Namely, how they are produced in and how they reproduce the very *material* inequality they are a part of.¹⁶

The political economy of youth education is underlined by a representation of youth as simultaneously emblematic of backward Balkan subjectivity, and the hope to transcend it in the “next generation.” While it is important to realise that the young people I met are not just powerless victims of neoliberal narratives—they also strategically use opportunities

¹⁵ The problem of youth-migration has moved to be centre of public debate in the Balkans and rest of Europe, often referred as a “demographic catastrophe.” A perhaps telling anecdote is a film created by a film student in Belgrade for an assignment on creating a documentary on the theme of “Serbia Today”. She made her film, “The Postgraduate Bang,” by recording her Skype conversations with three friends who are working and studying abroad. Marković, *Postdiplomski Tutanj*.

¹⁶ It is worth noting that this claim comes very close to a critical realist position of subscribing to a realist ontology and a constructivist epistemology. This project has already been pursued in different ways. For some examples of CR in IR, see the edited volume Joseph and Wight, *Scientific Realism and IR*. Empirically, this orientation has been used by self-proclaimed CRs to examine development in Africa as in Gruffydd Jones, *Explaining Global Poverty*. The proximity between CR and Foucault's work is explicitly discussed in Frauley, ‘Towards an Archaeological–Realist Foucauldian Analytics of Government’. While remaining sensitive to these theoretical debates and empirical contributions, this thesis departs from this project in its emphasis on lived experience as the entry point to any further discussion on structure.

presented to them—it is also crucial to recognize the power of those narratives. Anthropological studies of neoliberalism already captured how internalising the ideal of *homo oeconomicus* and the unwinnable battle to embody it play a part in post-socialist transitions: the failures of transition are not explained by questioning capitalism or liberal democracy, but they point to subjects who lack the skill and the will to practice democracy and capitalism *correctly*. In my fieldwork in NFE, this was obvious in explanations of problems that always focused on failed state policies in areas ranging from education and health care, to infrastructure and foreign policy.¹⁷ While such “critical thinking” is crucial to improve institutions that are indeed malfunctioning in Serbia and in the region more generally, such thinking also cuts short any kind of meaning making that would focus on the connections between systemic causes and the observations of these problems. In these discussions, the agency is located on the side of the local, but it becomes agency as pathology—an explanation of local failure to integrate within the global universal. Thus, thinking around unemployment through a focus on individual traits and state policies precludes observing connections between de-industrialization and privatisation as a part of a global neoliberalism. The discussion on agricultural underdevelopment vilifies small plots that are seen as signs of backwardness, in contrast to EU averages, even though increasing agreement is made on the devastating effects of mass industrial agriculture. The solutions presented in my observations focus on “what works:” emulating CAP, developing employability and skills, and pursuing EU accession. These issues are not presented as politics, but as what Wendy Brown calls “program implementation” that “eliminates from discussion politically, ethically, or otherwise normatively inflected dimensions of policy, aiming to supersede politics with practical, technical approaches to problems.”¹⁸ These are lived experiences of governing as *depoliticisation*.

In a way, this supports the view of intervention as a governmentalisation through depoliticisation: systemic discussion about redistribution and political rights is replaced with a focus on individual dispositions and technical policies. Yet what is missing from this account of depoliticisation is its direct and complete reliance on creating colonial difference. Only once the Balkan subject exists as backward, can it go on to serve as the culprit for the failures of transition. This specific view of governing—whether we call it neoliberalism, governance, or project politics—thus arrives as the *purification* of very specific local

¹⁷ The most obvious example is the connection between unemployment and inadequate higher education in Chapter 4.

¹⁸ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 130.

conditions. Its political rationality is not only imposed from the outside, but is layered upon situated histories made in the intersection of the local and the global.

ii. Problematising subject positions—translating colonial difference

The working of hierarchies here does not remain only on what Orlanda Obad refers to as the horizontal axis—a gradation of nations on their levels of Europeanness, but also on the vertical axis *within* particular societies.¹⁹ Horizontal difference is employed when the ideal of a modern subject is used to diagnose and act upon those lacking peace, democracy and development. The vertical axis, however, “uses notions related to Europeanness in order to (re)produce hierarchies and exercise exclusions/expulsions of various segments of the population.”²⁰ It operates *within* countries by assigning value to different portions of the same community based on their closeness to European ideals.²¹

The difference then is also embodied in the individualistic ideas about hard work and entrepreneurship that were used to explain why *some* people were targeted by governmental power to become more competitive and more ambitious, while *others* were conspicuously ignored. Critiques of intervention successfully unravel the many inequalities between those doing the intervention from the position of the international and those locals who are supposed to benefit from these practices.²² Not many, however, discuss the very different workings of power on subjects that could seemingly fall under the same category of the local.²³ Are the youth imagined becoming entrepreneurs the same youth that are supposed to learn to be cheap labour through dual education? Are the producers who will disappear in the “cleansings” of statistics the same local as those who package their production in fundable projects and are now reaping the first benefits of IPARD funds? Trying to approach the fields from the perspective of the targets, I have discovered that there is no *universal subject* that is created by the discourse of transition, although everyone had a basic understanding of what that subject would be. On the contrary, the same material and representational hierarchies were employed *within* specific populations to both produce a multiplicity of subjects *and* to justify the inequality between them as sacrifices made in the name of progress.

¹⁹ Obad, ‘How We Survived Europe’.

²⁰ Obad, 185–86, 188, 192.

²¹ Obad, 188, 192.

²² For an interesting perspective, see Baker’s work on local interpreters: Baker, ‘The Care and Feeding of Linguists’; Baker, ‘The Local Workforce of International Intervention in the Yugoslav Successor States’.

²³ Heathershaw, for example, does differentiate between “elite” and “subordinate” discourses of peace in Tajikistan, but in his account, the elite refers to those having political authority. I am more interested in the divisions amongst those who do not have political authority, see *Post-Conflict Tajikistan*, chap. 4. Kappler, on the other hand, recognizes the divisions in Bosnian society between the modern, liberal NGOs, and the rural, traditional *raja*, but she does not inquire further into it, *Local Agency and Peacebuilding*, 38.

The government of agriculture was the most obvious implementation of such divisions between those deemed improvable, and those expected to disappear. The difference between producers judged capable of engaging in a *truly* capitalist production, and those expected to vanish from statistics has been iterated not only by officials, Serbian or otherwise, but by producers themselves and the general population. The “stuck in the past/unwilling to modernise” reasons that seemingly explain the inability to raise production to European levels referred to both a *mentality* that refuses change and the very *material* lack of capacity to modernise means of production. The universal ideal of a progressive subject here is not just a goal anymore, but it becomes a legitimization of failure.

During many conversations in youth workshops I attended, it was obvious that most of these activities are “preaching to the choir” —the youth that is supposed to become more cosmopolitan, more international, more open-minded, and more entrepreneurial already saw themselves as embodying these characteristics in a way that the rest of the population does not. They were very clear on the difference between them as modern citizens, and their peers who were not a part of the choir to which the NGO sector was preaching: these young minds were open through nothing else than self-sacrifice. Skills were acquired through sacrificing hanging out and partying, to internships and courses. And these skills set the successful young adults I encountered apart from the unemployed masses that make the majority of youth in the country. And if those left behind were not developing skills for the labour market and attitudes that would make them compatible with liberal democracy, this is perceived to be *their* fault. It is precisely this *internal* differentiation that is often absent from discussions on interventions.

So colonial difference does not only justify the governmentalisation process by contrasting the modern international with a backward local, but it also justifies the very obvious differences between subjects coexisting in the everyday—in a way, it creates the quotidian “common sense” that naturalised the idea of “winners and losers of the transition.”²⁴ I will return to the issues of this internal differentiation later in the chapter.

²⁴ My use of the term common-sense here comes close to the way that Gramsci uses it. See Gramsci, *Essential Classics in Politics*, 640–42. However, his own use departs significantly from the usual understanding it has in English. In English, the term describes a capability most simply described as “plain wisdom” that rational individuals possess. In Gramsci, it means the truisms that are shared by a majority of any population that are rarely completely rational or coherent. As such, it does not carry the automatic positive meaning as it does in English. For more on this, see Ch 3 in Crehan, *Gramsci's Common Sense*. In my own use, the common-sense denotes a particular aspect of subjectivity: the meaning making that determines how one relates to oneself, one's position in the world, and one's relation to others—it thus straddles both the process of getting to these ideas, and the ideas themselves. For a discussion on the proximity of Foucault's ideas on governmentality and Gramsci's idea on the “common sense,” see Kurki, *Democratic Futures*, 222–26.

iii. Problematising forms of power—connecting different subject positions

Unsurprisingly, different subject positions are engaged by different forms of power. This was visible across my fieldwork—in youth education, some subjects were clearly meant to foster creativity and entrepreneurship, while others were destined for the dual education track to prepare for work in the many factories brought to Serbia through subsidized foreign direct investment. In agriculture, it was also obvious that growth is imagined equally through fostering the entrepreneurial spirit of a particular class of farmers, and by silencing and the disappearance of an incredible number of small and semi-subsistence farmers that do not have a place in the “family farm” oriented EU policies.

While uncovering the many forms of power in Serbia that work directly through constraint, rather than freedom, it is tempting to try to explain these forms of power through *combining* accounts of governmentality with concepts like authoritarianism. Mitchell Dean highlights this in his work on authoritarian governmentality. In the short reflections on authoritarian governmentality, Dean is right to point to the illiberality of liberalism, and how the most illiberal practices might be done with the best liberal intentions—like forced sterilizations in Scandinavia.²⁵ However, I am worried that such *reworking* of governmentality might be buying into the *myth* of liberalism that governmentality is supposed to break with.²⁶ While discussing the illiberal aspects of liberal government, Dean inadvertently reifies the division between the two and continues to uphold a vision of liberalism as something essentially good *if pure*—if only it would get rid of *some* unfortunate *aspects*. I agree that “[l]iberalism always contains the possibility of non-liberal interventions into the lives of those who do not possess the attributes required to play the city-citizen game”²⁷—but there are no separate forms of rule to speak of.

The experiences discussed in Part II of the thesis point to wildly different forms of rule. One group of youth is encouraged to dream big and think outside of the box, while another is taught to accept deteriorating labour conditions as the best they can get. One group of producers is encouraged to grow and usher Serbian agriculture back onto the world market, while another is repressed, unable to lease land, and abandoned to disappear. Yet,

²⁵ Dean, *Governmentality*.

²⁶ An informative account of “genealogy of governmentalities” in Serbia can be found in Mikuš, ‘Civil-Society Building’.

²⁷ Dean, *Governmentality*, 156.

these disparagingly different approaches still present *one rule*, that uses different techniques on different parts of the population.²⁸

iv. Problematising fields of visibility²⁹—connections beyond intervention

Finally, Part II of the thesis also explicitly challenges the fields of visibility that are prescribed by governmental interventions. An ethnographic approach made me abandon the usual courses and pamphlets in which I would look for governmentality of interventions in youth and agriculture, and invited me to pay closer attention to the varied actors and processes that the projects I was interested in included. This approach uncovered the limitations of research design independent of fieldwork experiences. My original research design had two conceptual limitations: it was concerned with *international* intervention, and it was concerned with neoliberal governmentality as a form of power that governs through *freedom*. Tensions arose as soon as I was faced with the realities of these interventions in fieldwork. While the above section introduced some tensions to the idea of *liberalism* as always relying on freedom, it is also worth complicating the idea of *international* that I encountered.

Firstly, focusing on international intervention heavily limited what practices I focused on. Each organisation and each project I learned about had to be confirmed to have received international funding. In NFE, this started to prove limiting once I was faced with artefacts such as the NAPZM document discussed in Chapter 4: yes, the organisation that created it did receive international grants, and yes, the process of state consultation with youth was itself probably a box ticking exercise for international donors of the state itself. However, once I was deep in conversation with the young man who managed the creation of the document, it became obvious that reducing his narrative to a direct effect of any particular project or intervention, would be unfairly reducing its intricacy. The only way to make sense of the program that he presented to me was to put it in conversation with both my own observations of youth, civil society, and the state, and with a spate of ethnographic

²⁸ Before returning to this point later in the chapter, I want to highlight here the fact that this type of interplay between wildly different forms of power—one making its subjects accept their circumstances, the other making their subjects always strive for more—is not something that is unique to “less-liberal” democracies or semi-authoritarian states. It is a defining governmental technique of liberalism that depends on subjectivation that accepts these divisions as common sense.

²⁹ I purposely employ the term “fields of visibility” because it was used by Death as one of the “distinctive feature of governmentality approaches.” I would like to highlight how going *beyond* those fields of visibility that are prescribed by governmental practice is crucial if we are to understand the experience of that government, rather than just its rationale. See Death, ‘Governmentality at the Limits of the International’.

literature that deals with the same issues from an anthropological, rather than intervention, perspective.

In agricultural governance, the tension was even more urgent: as I learned more and more about land policy, I kept hearing the same refutations about it not being a part of EU legislation, about it being firmly a “national issue,” about it not being an intervention itself. While the usual governmentality approach would see me going to the many workshops and reading NGO publications that rarely leave Belgrade offices, the emphasis on an ethnographic openness to a changing research question drew my attention to land policy—a field which was seemingly separated from what we usually understand as intervention, but a field in which politics were practiced through contestation and resistance. As I teased apart the public statements made by government officials, the narratives presented to me by those who are resisting the changes, and the experiences of producers themselves, I was forced to break free of the field of visibility prescribed by the EU intervention itself. That field of visibility excluded land policy, and it was land policy that mattered to the people I spoke to. Once I started investigating it more, it became obvious that the project of improving land policy was entangled in the same dynamics as the rest of EU mandated transformation of agricultural governance—markets, entrepreneurship, and modernisation ruled. For many of the people I spoke to, the two were not different: they were a part of the project of modernising Serbian agriculture towards European ideals.

This approach led me to interesting empirical findings, but, perhaps more importantly, it also highlighted the danger of remaining limited to the same fields of visibility that are prescribed by the intervention itself. Such a limitation would reify the ordering of the world as imagined by the intervention and hide the many workings that come together to make any particular field of intervention. Moreover, it would also once more exclude all those who are already silenced by those policies and again remove them from considerations of transformation in Serbia. Remaining within fields of visibility found in project documents and aims would hide the powerful ways in which narratives of intervention—such as employment, stability, and development—now have a life of their own, outside of what we traditionally understood as the effects of intervention. To start understanding how the intervention practices change the lives of its supposed beneficiaries, we have to expand our view beyond the fields of visibility prescribed by the intervention itself. The following section will address “studying up” from this expanded view.³⁰

³⁰ The idea of “studying up” was forwarded in 1972 in Nader, ‘Up the Anthropologist’.

II Studying up from disruptions

i. Navigating experiential and structural critique

“Analyzing a conjuncture requires peeling back layers of meaning and practice, and tracking relations across different spans of space and time. It is usually the work of scholars who can access data and make connections that are not necessarily emphasised by actors on the ground. The actors’ analysis is absolutely relevant, as it informs their actions, but like all analyses it offers a partial perspective on the situation. Scholars inevitably have a different perspective and can make use of the difference as a source of insight, so long as they don’t lay claim to an omniscient, bird’s-eye view.”³¹

So far, this chapter highlighted the expanded view created by allowing the experiences of those targeted by interventions to guide empirical practice. The starting point was an ethnographic engagement with the supposed beneficiaries of this process. The ethnographic orientation of the project was a conscious decision to counter the tendency of governmentality studies to analytically bypass the subjects with whose subjectivation it is supposed to be concerned. In short, the decolonial critique of accounts that use governmentality to make sense of, and argue against, intervention, centres on those whose voices are erased in this process: by critiquing the Western governmental power for working to produce liberal subjects around the world, these anti-imperialist accounts still ignore the political subjectivity of the *targets* of that power. However, while “adding” ethnography to the mix to enable more engagement with experiences of the subjects of intervention might lead to problematising subjects, forms of power, and fields of visibility, it is still unclear *where* such observations might lead. This is because there is an on-going tension between experiential critique—pursued through decolonial engagements and ethnography,³² and critiques that focus on larger structures that shape intervention encounters.

The tension is perhaps captured best in Kai Koddenbrock’s response to Sabaratnam’s insistence on taking local experiences seriously.³³ Koddenbrock pointed out that the recent rush to incorporate “thick descriptions” under which the emphasis on local subjectivities

³¹ Li, *Land’s End*, 15–16.

³² The same objection is also raised against more standard versions of governmentality that are committed to fencing out forces that might structure the experiences and practices at hand. I will return to this point later.

³³ It is worth noting that Koddenbrock’s article came out before Sabaratnam’s book and is therefore largely based on the articles in which similar arguments are developed. However, the book brings out the more structural argument about coloniality of power and colonial difference.

might be understood, could not account for bigger structures, namely capitalism.³⁴ Thus, a focus on experience poses empiricist limits on critique—reducing it to what is accessible “through actors only.”³⁵ He uncovers a “family resemblance” between Sabaratnam’s focus on the “interpretations given by people of their own situations” and the “non-structuralist forms of critique that have dominated intervention critique throughout the last 25 years.”³⁶

More than theoretical considerations of this problem, my own empirical practice crystallized further political issues with an approach that would always start from the explanations offered by those targets. For example, one of the resistance logics against the land grabs in Serbia has been led by radical right organisations. In addition to opposing the liberalisation of the land market and foreign direct investments in land, these organisations are also anti-Semitic, anti-Roma, and homophobic. It can be argued that these are the local interpretations of the material context that Sabaratnam argues should be the starting point of our research. As discussed in the Introduction, this focus is both analytical—can tell us more about the phenomenon under investigation, *and* political—it works towards “recognition and humanisation” of these voices that are usually erased. However, one must ask whether these voices should be recognised and given a platform given their political implications? Where would such research lead if these interpretations were taken at face value? If we were to use them as a starting point, we would have to contextualize their exclusionary politics within the dynamic of a global crisis as the driving force behind the radicalization of politics, and engage further into the hierarchies of modern/traditional which they flip in their politics. Otherwise we run “the risk of reproducing the agents’ conceptions and, worse, fail to explain structural contexts of practices”—a problem common to approaches with a preference for “flat ontology” and the refusal of any attempt to go beyond experiences of the actors to abstract social structures.³⁷

The debate is reminiscent of the eternal agency vs. structure dilemmas present in various literatures. It was articulated in a materialist critique of post-colonial studies that condemned the reduction of colonialism to a “cultural event” and advocated a more sustained examination of the social context of capitalism and imperialism.³⁸ The same critique is voiced in IR and scrutinizes IR approaches that negate a deeper discussion of social structures in

³⁴ Koddenbrock, ‘Strategies of Critique in International Relations’, n. 21.

³⁵ Koddenbrock, 9, 16.

³⁶ Koddenbrock, 9.

³⁷ Joseph and Kurki, ‘The Limits of Practice’, 83.

³⁸ This is a long-standing critique. For an example, see the essays collected in Parry, *Postcolonial Studies*.

favour of focus on norms and identities. Within governmentality studies, it was the critique of “flat ontology” discussed in Chapter 2.³⁹ As such, I have no illusion of being able to offer a conclusive answer. However, the following section discusses *scale* in hopes of contributing to the project of trying to “study up” from the experiences of the governed.

ii. Scale—applying and explaining power

These analytical and methodological issues can be framed around scale: how to study *up* from experiences of the targets, how the domestic and international *levels* interact during intervention, and on what *scale* do we have to study and think to make sense of intervention practices today.⁴⁰ This section will inquire further into politics of scale by differentiating between scale as *identity*, as a point of *application* of power, and as an *explanatory* framework.

Issues of scale have recently been picked up by scholars of intervention, particularly in Peace and Conflict studies. Annika Björkdahl and Stefanie Kappler identify different strands of literature.⁴¹ The first one dealt with a critique of the international design of peace which was apparently insensitive to local cultural differences.⁴² This critique, which focussed on the “international *versus* the local,” was soon replaced with the second strand of literature that discusses “the international *encountering* the local” and the hybridity that results from those encounters.⁴³ Recently, we have seen a more complex engagement with the social construction and fluidity of scales that tries to both theoretically and empirically problematise the labels of local and international.⁴⁴ This last move emphasises “that scales are socially constructed and thus historically changeable through sociopolitical contestation.”⁴⁵ This move inspired studies of intervention that focus on how these labels of local and international are essentialised and put into political use.⁴⁶

This effort to complicate scale as identity builds on a rich literature across disciplines that has similarly deconstructed the binaries of local and global in which the global is

³⁹ For the former, see Kurki and Sinclair, ‘Hidden in Plain Sight’; Joseph and Kurki, ‘The Limits of Practice’. For IR critiques of governmentality, see the response in Vradi, ‘Universal but Not Truly “Global”’. For a comment on more general governmentality studies, see Frauley, ‘The Expulsion of Foucault from Governmentality Studies’.

⁴⁰ I am aware that I am partially reifying these terms by using them in this way. However, I do so to point out how this scalar way of thinking is present even when not explicitly named in these discussions. Before moving beyond, I try to make them visible.

⁴¹ Björkdahl and Kappler, *Peacebuilding and Spatial Transformation*, 4.

⁴² Richmond, *The Transformation of Peace*.

⁴³ MacGinty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance*; Richmond, ‘The Dilemmas of a Hybrid Peace’.

⁴⁴ Buckley Zistel, ‘Frictional Spaces’; Kappler, ‘The Dynamic Local’; Björkdahl et al., *Peacebuilding and Friction*; Hameiri and Jones, ‘Beyond Hybridity to the Politics of Scale’.

⁴⁵ Brenner, ‘The Limits to Scale?’, 599.

⁴⁶ Richmond, Kappler, and Björkdahl, ‘The “Field” in the Age of Intervention’.

construed as “a space that is dynamic, thrusting, open, rational, cosmopolitan and dominant while the local is communitarian, authentic, closed, static, nostalgic, defensive (but ultimately defenceless) and the site of ethnic, sexual, regional and other fragmentary identities.”⁴⁷ Moreover, this thinking is pursued in works that focus on *politics of scale*.⁴⁸ This term, which originates in geography, has inspired works that inquire into not only how scales are constructed, but also how they are used in governing interventions.

Andreas Hirblinger and Claudia Simmons focus on the uses of the local and argue “for a more systematic engagement with the effects that representations of the local have on peacebuilding” — a project already pursued in Chapter 1 of the thesis.⁴⁹ Shahar Hameiri and Lee Jones follow this path when they talk about how different scales, not just the local, are used in governing. Writing against hybridity as reifying identities supposedly prior to hybridisation, they argue that the result of intervention is not simply “hybrid,” but “a product of conflict between social groups struggling to determine order in target states, including by constructing scales and modes of governance where their interests will prevail.”⁵⁰ Their empirical practice then continues to analyse how different scales are used by different parties in particular interventions — here, scales are not fixed, but strategically created and used.

However, I would like to move beyond conceptualising scale as *identity*, even if strategically used as in the case of Hameiri and Jones, to talk about scale as a point of *application* of power, and scale as an *explanatory* feature. It is worth quoting Jean and John Comaroff at length:

“This, finally, is a problem of scale: of determining, in respect of any given ethnography — contemporary, historical, or both — the stretch of relations, concrete processes, imaginings, spatial planes commensurate to its realisation. ‘Locality’ is not everywhere, nor for every purpose, the same thing; sometimes it is a family, sometimes a town, sometimes a nation, sometimes a flow or a field, sometimes a continent or even the world; often it lies at the point of articulation among two or more of these things. Similarly, translocal, planetary connections and forces do not impinge equally or in like manner on all aspects of human thought, action, and interaction. In this respect, it is important not to forget that ‘the local’ and ‘the global’ do not describe received empirical realities. They are analytic constructs whose

⁴⁷ Ley, ‘Transnational Spaces and Everyday Lives’, 155; quoted in Marston, Jones, and Woodward, ‘Human Geography without Scale’, 428; See also Appadurai, ‘The Production of Locality’; Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Discipline and Practice’; Massey, *For Space*.

⁴⁸ The term was first introduced in Smith, *Uneven Development*, 172–73. For more on its use in geography, see Cox, ‘Representation and Power in the Politics of Scale’; Brenner, ‘The Limits to Scale?’; Marston, ‘The Social Construction of Scale’; Marston, Jones, and Woodward, ‘Human Geography without Scale’.

⁴⁹ Hirblinger and Simons, ‘The Good, the Bad, and the Powerful’, 434.

⁵⁰ Hameiri and Jones, ‘Beyond Hybridity to the Politics of Scale’, 60.

heuristic utility depends entirely on the way in which they are deployed to illuminate historically specific phenomena.”⁵¹

In this quote, the issues of scale are not limited to how actors use them strategically, but they are also implicated in the politics of research—how we “describe political realities” is very much connected to the scalar commitments of our theories. In discussing this explanatory feature of scale, governmentality studies prove to be a useful starting point because this literature is so implicated in the issues of scale. Governmentality is imagined as being able to link the macro to the micro by

“reconnect[ing] studies of the exercise of power at the molecular level—in community development corporations, informal economies, neighborhood watch groups, empowerment zones, micro credit extensions, and poverty survival mechanisms—with strategies to program power at the city, state, national, and even supranational level.”⁵²

Despite this, the scalar potential of governmentality has been heavily debated both within IR and in other disciplines.⁵³

These discussions on governmentality in IR imply a twofold scalar differentiation that is never explicitly discussed—a different scale is invoked when discussing *application* of governmentality as a form of power, and another one when using governmentality as an *explanatory* framework. Firstly, when discussing the level of application, the debate is whether something at the international level is governing *states* or directly *populations* of those states.⁵⁴ For example, if we are talking about the EU, the question would be: is the EU governing Serbian citizens directly by bypassing the Serbian state, or is it governing the state itself? Talking about the international level, then, implies interactions *between states*—a supposedly anarchical system without the relationship of formal freedom that liberalism

⁵¹ Comaroff and Comaroff, ‘Occult Economies’, 294 citing; Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*; Gupta and Ferguson, *Anthropological Locations*; Gupta and Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*.

⁵² Fairbanks, ‘On Theory and Method’, 552.

⁵³ There are two main critiques found in geography: one is that governmentality approaches uncover the variety of neoliberalism, but since they do not take account any macro/institutional factors, they cannot account for the difference (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore, ‘Variegated Neoliberalization’, 202.) The second one argues that “the interconnections between the micro-foundations of political economy (at the level of subjectivity) and its meso-level institutional as well as macro-structuring principles have not been sufficiently articulated” (Fairbanks, ‘On Theory and Method’, 551).

⁵⁴ Joseph, ‘Governmentality of What?’

attributes to domestic orders. And because governmentality relies on relations of formal freedom, governmentality cannot be *applied* to the international realm.⁵⁵

Secondly, there is a debate about the explanatory potential of governmental readings. Namely, can governmentality only be used for “empiricism of the surface,”⁵⁶ or must/can it do more, either on its own or by using more Marxist inspired social ontologies.⁵⁷ Is governmentality useful for explaining only the micro workings of power, or can it contribute something to the macro understandings of the origins of that power? We can then ask: where do we have to look to understand the connections between youth unemployment and civil society building, or between land policy and EU enlargement, or between political activism and ideas of entrepreneurship? Is it enough to look at micro practices like CV writing, and the experiences of those engaging in them, or do we have to look beyond—in the structures that both make one unemployed and in need of a CV, and simultaneously design the solution in the form of an improved CV, rather than an improved economic system?

When talking about the *application* of governmentality on a particular scale, we cannot seek to identify the scale at which power operates when the scales themselves are effects of power. When Joseph asks “governmentality of what,”⁵⁸ or juxtaposes the “unevenness”⁵⁹ of the international to an implied “evenness” of the domestic, we are led to an uncritical view of scales, and their essential characteristics, that somehow independently exist from each other.⁶⁰ Separating “the assessment of international politics” from “interventions in domestic policies”⁶¹ is not possible in a time when global politics both reshape individual states, and reach individuals directly. This has been explored in both studies of intervention, and studies of transformations of statehood.

Studies of intervention emphasise that there is no such thing as a purely *domestic* intervention, as much as there is no such thing as an *international* intervention that does not engage the domestic state. Hameiri, for example emphasises how intervention works both internally through the state, and externally besides it. In his detailed case studies of Australian interventions in multiple settings, he argues that “interventions are both

⁵⁵ Selby, ‘Engaging Foucault’; Joseph, ‘Governmentality of What?’; Joseph, ‘The Limits of Governmentality’.

⁵⁶ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 57; Walters, ‘The Political Rationality of European Integration’, 157; cited in Joseph, ‘The Limits of Governmentality’, 241.

⁵⁷ See Selby, ‘Engaging Foucault’, 341 for a short review of literature working on this intersection.

⁵⁸ Joseph, ‘Governmentality of What?’

⁵⁹ Joseph, ‘The Limits of Governmentality’, 224, 230, 234, 235, 241, 242.

⁶⁰ For another argument for this ontological difference between the domestic and the international, see Selby, ‘Engaging Foucault’. For a discussion of these arguments, see Walters, *Governmentality*, 97–100.

⁶¹ Joseph, ‘Governmentality of What?’, 413.

expressions and drivers of significant qualitative *transformations* in the nature of statehood,”⁶² and statebuilding interventions always have an internal-external nature. He goes on to identify this feature as a unique “multilevel” character that cannot be captured through methodological nationalism—an important lesson when trying to conceptualise scale as a point of application.⁶³

This argument is explored from a different perspective in Andre Thiemann’s thesis on the Serbian state. Although it is concerned with statehood, rather than intervention, the thesis also reflects on how supra-national forces, including international assistance, shaped both the state and the individual’s relation to the state.⁶⁴ In his thesis, we see a bottom up perspective of the transformations of statehood that Hameiri also explored. Approaching *themes*, rather than *scales*, could then be more productive in exploring ways of governing that transcend scales.

More than just in intervention scholarship, power in general cannot be theorised on clear-cut scales.⁶⁵ It is my argument here that insisting on conceptual clarity in regard to scale, might actually be hurting, rather than helping our analyses. In their seminal essay, Ferguson and Gupta warn that choosing the demarcations of scale is in itself a political choice, rather than a phenomenological fact,⁶⁶ not least because our construction of those lines may hide the workings of the global and the international within societies.⁶⁷ By choosing to study the local application of intervention or looking for rules that differently govern the international, we are losing sight of the ways that these scales are not only co-created, but also of all the hierarchies that are implied in those terms. Instead of asking what scale governmentality is applied on, it would be useful to ask how scales are used in governing, *and* how governmentality connects these different scales. Chapters 4 and 5 have thus asked not at what scale are youth and agriculture governed, but how the images of scales are used in governing. How does the idea of a backward local subject work in intervention? How

⁶² Hameiri, *Regulating Statehood State Building and the Transformation of the Global Order*, 208.

⁶³ Hameiri, 210–12.

⁶⁴ Thiemann, ‘State Relations’, 149, 33. His examples specifically refer to “how the assemblage of the Yugoslav welfare state was historically co-produced by international, national, and local actors translating socialist, social democratic, and liberal welfare traditions,” and how “international human security discourses were adopted locally in negotiations of neediness and deservingness.” Another example is in Vetta’s study of the implementation of a “community-based approach” in the Community Revitalization through Democratic Action program funded by USAID. Vetta, ““Democracy Building” in Serbia’.

⁶⁵ Vraști, ‘Universal but Not Truly “Global”’, 53; citing Walker, *Inside/Outside*; Beier, *International Relations in Uncommon Places*. In anthropology, see Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Spatializing States’.

⁶⁶ Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Spatializing States’.

⁶⁷ Darby, ‘Pursuing the Political’, 9.

does the image of a “modern Europe” frame political action? How are these scalar images (re)produced?

Yet, stating the scale that is used by actors is not enough. This might give us insight into politics of scale as defined by Hameiri and Jones—they uncover the strategic uses of scale and help make sense of empirical realities.⁶⁸ I however, would like to move beyond just identifying scale and ask a larger question about the relationship between the local and the global. A useful approach is presented by Heather Johnson who uses ethnography to “narrate entanglements” of the local and the global that are accessible through quotidian experience. In her approach, the separation is not only complicated, but embraced in an argument that the “everyday lives and decisions” of her interlocutors, migrants, “*call into being* a global politics that engages fundamental question of political agency, of exclusion and marginalization, and of power and resistance.”⁶⁹ In this view, the local and the global are not opposed, nor just strategically used, but they are simultaneous and can be approached as such. The global here is not simply an “amalgamation of the local,” nor is the local an instance of the vernacularization of the global. On the contrary, they are conceptualised “as mutually constitutive, as calling each other into being.”⁷⁰ This echoes Li’s warning that even when we study something so “fine grained” as to be ethnographically approachable, our study is not “bounded” — “[i]t is still composed of a set of elements that have varied spatial and temporal scope. It is also formed by elements that are weak or absent.”⁷¹

Hence, to understand either the local or the global, we must seek explanations across scales: instead of looking at the subjects of intervention as faulty post-socialist locals who slow the global march of democracy or capitalism, or seeking to explain everything by grand narratives that silence individual voices, we can allow a research project that would traverse different scales. Such a project is “more attuned to the complex political realities we inhabit” precisely because the worlds that we inhabit do not always support the heuristic devices we use to study them.⁷² In explaining the realities on the ground, it is imperative to both listen to voices that would usually be dismissed as micro, local, or everyday, and use the privileged/different position of theory to try to make sense of those voices. This approach to

⁶⁸ Hameiri and Jones, ‘Beyond Hybridity to the Politics of Scale’.

⁶⁹ Johnson, ‘Narrating Entanglements’, 384.

⁷⁰ Johnson, 385, 388.

⁷¹ Li, *Land’s End*, 19.

⁷² Vrsti, ‘Universal but Not Truly “Global”’, 53–54; citing Sassen, ‘Territory and Territoriality in the Global Economy’.

scale adds another layer to the discussion—theories are now somehow supposed to be *above* the messy attachments of the everyday, and we are ushered into a new set of dichotomous thinking between theory being able to analyse because of its removal and higher view, while fieldwork and experience remains subjective and unable to *rise above* its entanglements to form a valid analysis.⁷³

Views—whether they come from academic theories or everyday experiences are always *partial*—and putting them in conversation, rather than prioritizing one or the other is a more productive research avenue.⁷⁴ Using governmentality as a *translating device* can help this conversation. Rather than understanding governmentality as a form of power to be applied or a theoretical framework that seeks to definitively explain, we can treat governmentality as Foucault referred to it: a “point of view” and “method of decipherment” that can be useful for various scales.⁷⁵

As early as 2004, Jeremy Gould identified scale as one of the key constitutive tensions, along with positionality, of *aidnographies*. In his words, any attempt to understand aid, and I would add intervention, implies “transscalar observation” and needs a “‘translating device’ for making data accumulated at different sites, and at localities within a site, mutually comprehensible.”⁷⁶ This project has shown how governmentality can be used as a translating device—it can help guide and make sense of observations in fieldwork, but it can also ask new questions about things that seemingly do not make sense *and* tease apart what seems natural. Using the narrative of governmentality as a connection between effects, practices, and programs can help discern how the solutions to problems become so common-sense that even the questions we might ask are narrowly defined. Governmentality here translated between the experiences I heard about, projects they were engaged by, and bigger structural hierarchies that shaped them.

Interpreting Part II of the thesis through a radical opening of scale regarding both *application* and *explanation* once again highlights that a critique that would remain both sensitive to the experience of the targets and open to systemic dynamics cannot be easily theorised as a methodological or analytical recipe. This thesis demonstrated the potential of

⁷³ Gramsci makes a similar case for philosophy remaining related to “the simple” in contact with which it should find “the source of the problems it sets out to study and to resolve.” Gramsci, *Essential Classics in Politics*, 636–67.

⁷⁴ Li, *Land's End*, 180.

⁷⁵ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 186.

⁷⁶ Gould, ‘Positionality and Scale’, 283.

ethnography to provide a materialist base to governmentality—not through reaching for grand narratives, but through a careful consideration of lived hierarchies—difference in both its material and cultural forms.⁷⁷ In the debate on whether we need a “flat ontology,” or structural attentiveness, the perhaps unexciting answer is that we need both. It is true that we need more than governmentality’s flat ontology or the decolonial emphasis on experiential knowledge to start making sense of the world, but the answer is not going back to deterministic Foucauldian or Marxist narratives. The answer might be in the constant oscillation between the two, between the theory and the field, and between our own expectations and surprises. This enables a more reflexive understanding of scale and ways of studying.⁷⁸ This way of studying can allow us to “think big” through ethnographic imagination to structures and hierarchies that make global politics, and force us to remain humble through practicing an ethnography that would not easily dismiss the interpretations of our interlocutors.

iii. Beyond liberalism vs. authoritarianism—intervention and forms of rule

More than just situating the effects of intervention in the wider political, social, and economic field, this thesis also raises an argument about government in general. Governmentality studies present a specific vision of (neo)liberalism as government through freedom. This assumption has a twofold effect. First, it underlines the discussions on scale because it divides the world into a domestic realm which has conditions of freedom, and the international that lacks it. The discussion above has focused on transcending this binary of local-international by undoing scalar thinking. However, it is also important to note how much this division is crucial for liberalism itself. In her analysis, Beate Jahn shows how the division between the domestic and the international is in fact a product of liberalism—one that allows liberalism as a universal idea to survive in a world where the international realm is imagined as an anarchical space and governed through non-liberal practices.⁷⁹ As such, by

⁷⁷ For a discussion of ethnographic possibilities in regard to neoliberal governmentality, see Fairbanks, ‘On Theory and Method’, 557; Burawoy, ‘The Extended Case Method’; Gregory, *Black Corona*; Comaroff and Comaroff, ‘Millennial Capitalism’.

⁷⁸ This is not an argument for empiricism nor just a warning against the reification of theories that we use as tools for explaining the social world. As this thesis has shown, the tensions between the two are productive and these tensions cannot be present without the two *meeting*. If anything, this is an invitation for a perhaps braver and less certain embrace of these tensions—not to just limit and situate our theories and grand narratives, but to learn from their disruptions.

⁷⁹ Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism*, 31–32.

unreflexively subscribing to this vision of scales we are once again reifying this fragmentary nature of liberalism.⁸⁰

Second, while such an approach has been fruitful in helping us discern the impossibility of locating subjectivities as somehow *outside* power, it has also tended to over-emphasise the benevolent, subtle, and indirect nature of that government. The difficulty is summarized well in William Walter's recent reflection on governmentality studies, where he notes "the tendency in many studies of governmentality to focus on indirect forms of power while downplaying or overlooking the presence of relations of force, violence and struggle."⁸¹ Part II of the thesis highlighted the "force, violence and struggle" and showed that subjects are governed through *both* freedom and constraint. It would seem logical to interpret forms of rule that diverge from enticing subjects along a particular path of freedom as a *failure* of governmentality. But this would be once again reifying the form of rule that we seek to critique.

As Thomas Lemke powerfully argued in early 2000s, the unexpected results of liberal governmentality should be seen as constitutive elements of governmental practices. "Compromises, fissures, and incoherencies" are not signs of the *failure* of liberal programs, but the very "conditions of their existence."⁸² These failures range from varied forms of resistance explored in both agriculture and youth politics, the constraining political economy of youth unemployment in Chapter 4, or the very authoritarian approach to neoliberalisation of agricultural government in Chapter 5. Yet instead of treating them as something *external* to government, they should be seen as constitutive of the way government unfolds in Serbia. This lesson is crucial for studies of intervention and studies of forms of rule: identifying success and failure or searching for *if*, *where*, or *why* liberal governmentality "works" will never be enough. While governmentality is useful for a focus on subjectivity that transcend scales by a focus on effects, practices, and programmes of government, it is incomplete if we imagine it to always work through freedom. Such an approach presupposes a vision of (neo)liberalism as a well-functioning system of governing through freedom and improvement. This view traps research in accounting for its failures, rather than exploring

⁸⁰ Jahn, 173.

⁸¹ Walters, 'The Microphysics of Power Redux', 61; citing Allen and Goddard, 'The Domestication of Foucault'. Elsewhere, Walters refers to this as the "liberal bias" of governmentality studies, Walters, *Governmentality*, 72–74. Allen and Goddard here also bring out important points about politically situating governmentality studies and their relation to violence and struggle.

⁸² Lemke, 'Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique', 57.

its effects more widely and putting in conversations its multiple *compromises*, *fissures*, and *incoherencies*. Moreover, such a view also comes dangerously close to buying into the ideological self-image of liberalism as something intrinsically positive, explaining its negatives as only distortions, and imagining solutions in the form of nostalgia for the good old days of the liberal social contract.⁸³

Once we abandon such a view, the challenge becomes to investigate liberalism as a lived reality, or what Vrasti referred to as “actually existing liberalism.”⁸⁴ Recent approaches to interventions have emphasised “the interweaving and therefore the mutual constitution of liberal and non-liberal social formations”⁸⁵ and conceptualised liberalism “as a specific form of governmental reason and practice produced at the intersection of the European and non-European worlds, [...] always [...] hybrid, encompassing within its project both ‘liberal’ and ‘non-liberal’ spaces, practices and subjects.”⁸⁶ Further inquiring into this logic of liberalism, Jahn traces the same foundational contradictions of liberalism in both pre-1989 modernisation theories, and post-1989 democracy transition theories, thus connecting early development interventions to current democracy promotion and statebuilding paradigms.⁸⁷ The liberal intervention system in her account fundamentally depends on its core contradiction: “the universalist claim that all peoples are free and able to govern themselves, and the particularist philosophy of history which posits a developmental inequality between liberals and nonliberals and thus denies the latter these rights.”⁸⁸ Through this, the system is able to externalize its own failures—the failures of peacebuilding, development, and democracy promotion are “subsumed under the existing paradigm and consequently blamed on the policy targets.”⁸⁹ Liberalism then, does not depend on just governing through freedom but also on justifying the lack of a universal state of freedom by clearly separating those deemed to have the potential for freedom from the rest.⁹⁰

The failure of non-formal youth education to build a Western style civil society, the inability of Serbian agriculture to compete with the EU market, or the varied contestations

⁸³ Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism’, 268–69. See also Jahn’s comment on reifying this fragmentary nature of liberalism by accepting it. Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism*, 173.

⁸⁴ Vrasti, ‘Universal but Not Truly “Global”’, 66.

⁸⁵ Rampton and Nadarajah, ‘A Long View of Liberal Peace and Its Crisis’, 6.

⁸⁶ Laffey and Nadarajah, ‘The Hybridity of Liberal Peace’, 416.

⁸⁷ Jahn, ‘The Tragedy of Liberal Diplomacy (I)’; Jahn, ‘The Tragedy of Liberal Diplomacy (II)’.

⁸⁸ Jahn, ‘The Tragedy of Liberal Diplomacy (II)’, 224.

⁸⁹ Jahn, 221. For an explicit discussion of this self-referential loop of solving the failures of interventions with more intervention, see Koddenbrock, ‘Recipes for Intervention’.

⁹⁰ See also Hutchings, ‘Liberal Quotidian Practices of World Ordering’, 162.

and resistances uncovered in both policy areas, are then not *just* failures that we need to find causes for—they are crucial for the functioning of actually existing liberalism in Serbia. This complicates not only the usual reliance on the conceptualisation of intervention as an encounter between “liberal peace” and the “non-liberal” worlds,⁹¹ but also leads to new questions about ways of understanding forms of rule and individuals’ attachments to it.

Examining this lived reality of liberalism is possible only once we give up on asking *whether* intervention works, or *where* governmentality can be applied. While Joseph is right to emphasise the very different realities facing the Global South and the Global North, the interveners and those intervened upon, it is not enough to “highlight the differences in its [global governmentality’s] realisation in different parts of the world.”⁹² Accepting them as completely different systems of rule would once again buy into the fragmentary nature of liberalism analysed by Jahn. The non-liberal is always somehow outside of liberalism, never theorised as its constitutive parts. It is a part of the international realm as opposed to the domestic one, it is found in “those” countries that are somehow a denigration of teleological development stories. Moreover, it is understood as a deformation of the present, thus temporally relegating the perfect completion of the liberal project to the continuously postponed future.⁹³

Approaches that rely on the existence of different systems and explanations of their geneses often employ teleological and linear understandings of development. They imagine forms of government outside “advanced liberal democracies” that depend on more coercive measures as existing *outside* liberalism and “revert[ing] *back* to something *more basic*.”⁹⁴ In doing so, these approaches read difference in conditions as different “levels of development”⁹⁵ and inevitably fall back into thinking temporally unfolding levels. In anthropology, this is famously explored by Johannes Fabian who emphasised how anthropological production depends on a “denial of coevalness:” “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse.”⁹⁶ Building onto his work within IR, David Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah have shown how this kind of thinking both enables social sciences as an

⁹¹ Rampton and Nadarajah, ‘A Long View of Liberal Peace and Its Crisis’.

⁹² Joseph, ‘The Limits of Governmentality’, 230.

⁹³ Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism*, 182–92.

⁹⁴ Joseph, 224–25. Emphasis added.

⁹⁵ Joseph, 230.

⁹⁶ Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 31.

endeavour of explaining *difference* between units, and how this process hides liberalism's "lurking internal others—poverty, violence, disorder."⁹⁷ Thus, this separation of levels enables teleological readings of history that see all locations moving through the same universal developmental stages, paint difference as endogenous *denigration*, and support the view that sees these "denigrations" as *outside* of liberalism.

On the contrary, it is more effective to consider how these different levels are not temporally separated, but horizontally connected. To do this, it is necessary to break with both state-centrism and the reading of the world as divided into the liberal West and the non-liberal Rest. They both consider states as homogenous containers of societies and far oversimplify the realities of inequalities on the ground. Here comes to fore the potential of focusing on subject production. While it is true that in many accounts of governmentality, including this one, there remains a "question concerning the level where government operates,"⁹⁸ it is important to remember that power is dispersed—not just emanating from the state across *society*, but across what we usually imagine as *levels*. So instead of having to look to other parts of the world, it is also possible to look at specific communities and the divisions in them to discover how different forms of power *always* operate on various exclusions and inclusions.

While intervention techniques that promote entrepreneurship, civil society building, and democracy in Serbia are underlined by governmental ideals of the *homo oeconomicus*, it would be foolish to expect the development of a population, state, or economy that resemble the sources of that intervention—"global neoliberal government ... does not, and cannot, work on a truly global level."⁹⁹ However, that some populations are seemingly excluded from liberal ideas or subjected to non-liberal forms of power, does not mean that they are somehow *outside* of the liberal project, nor does it undermine the universal claims of that project.¹⁰⁰ Liberalism always works through inclusions and exclusion, through both freedom and imperialism.¹⁰¹ It promises universalism, yet its fragmentary nature and internal contradictions constantly produce inequality.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*, 89–93; Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*, 9.

⁹⁸ Joseph, 'The Limits of Governmentality', 228.

⁹⁹ Kiersey, 'Neoliberal Political Economy and the Subjectivity of Crisis', 385; cited in Vrsti, 'Universal but Not Truly "Global"', 64.

¹⁰⁰ Vrsti, 'Universal but Not Truly "Global"', 64.

¹⁰¹ Vrsti, 56.

¹⁰² Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism*, 186–88.

Thus, intervention as the promotion of liberalism is not constrained to policies promoted by international agencies as Dean would have us think.¹⁰³ It works through a series of universals with material and representational attachments. While the majority of the thesis investigated this empirically in Part II, I hope the contribution to be greater than adding empirical detail. The “messiness” of these politics is not just an interesting ethnographic travelogue nor an accidental distortion of liberal rule—it is a constitutive part of power, alienation, and inequality that makes lived realities.¹⁰⁴ The different forms of power are not somehow “reverting” to coercion or “going forwards” towards freedom. They work together to make the present. While most critical scholars of intervention denounce the idea of linear development, we are yet to engage with the fact that seriously giving up on linearity would mean radical coevalness. In that coevalness, we are forced to recognise that many different parts are contemporaneously *connected*. The differences cannot be explained by different stages of development, nor by invoking essentialisms that might justify them. The differences are a consequence of a much larger labouring of different racial, gender, ethnic, and regional classifications.¹⁰⁵ Freedom does not come *after* constraint, as interventions from colonialism, modernisation, development, liberal peace, and transition have all told us—but they coexist.

What does this focus on *liberalism as lived reality* tell us? First of all, it opens up the empirical detail that we need if we are to even begin to think about projects that reconstruct subjecthoods—whether of those deemed *free*, or those *silenced* already through the practices of the dark side of liberalism. Secondly, in this thesis, it points to limitations of the concept of intervention itself in trying to understand the effects that the practices of creating liberalism have on the targets. It is by now well-argued that promises of liberalism will never come—its fragmentary nature means that any attempt at achieving a “universal realisation of liberal principles is bound to fail.”¹⁰⁶ This is an important lesson for studies of interventions that are underpinned by liberal theories, but it is not enough for the current project. Saying that liberalism failed/is failing/will fail does not help us explore the myriad of effects that these interventions have *beyond* the success/failure binary.

¹⁰³ Dean, ‘Liberal Government and Authoritarianism’, 53 cited in Joseph, ‘The Limits of Governmentality’, 224.

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of Foucauldian themes in relation to inequality, see Venn, ‘Neoliberal Political Economy, Biopolitics and Colonialism’. For a theoretical engagement with inequality from a decolonial perspective, see Boatcă, *Global Inequalities beyond Occidentalism*. For empirically informed studies, see the Special Edition of *Current Sociology*: Boatcă et al., ‘Dynamics of Inequalities in a Global Perspective’.

¹⁰⁵ Grosfoguel, ‘Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy’. The origin of these hierarchies is rarely discussed—I will come back to this later in this chapter.

¹⁰⁶ Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism*, 9.

This thesis argues that instead of explaining whether intervention works, and why, it is more useful to see *how* it works through its “core contradictions” of simultaneously arguing for a universal subject, and being dependent on a separation between subjects worthy of that universal status, and those who are not. These separations work both horizontally between countries, and vertically within particular societies—two axes intimately connected. The importance of such understanding does not lie only in its ability to tell us something about liberalism, but because it is a starting point to understanding forms of power and rule that shape lived experiences. This would be a case of studying liberalism as a lived reality—not as a pure form of liberal governmentality in which we expect everyone to enthusiastically work on self-improvement, but as an always already hybrid system of government that depends on nurturing freedom *and* constraint simultaneously. Once we can see connection across scales, locations, and populations, we can more easily discern the way the intervention is implicated in colonial difference. Interventions then should not be studied as differentiated between those coercive and those that govern through freedom, but examined as a struggle to negotiate the relations between the two.

III From intervention to politics of improvement

i. Dislocating intervention

Trying to make sense of experiences by critically approaching politics of scale and exploring actually existing liberalism in the end dislocates the intervention itself. As Nadarajah and Rampton already argue, once we stop perceiving politics of intervention as somehow “up there” and stop reducing the local/everyday to being the “antithesis of the international,” we become open to “the historical co-constitution of the international, national, and local and the relations of power that connect these in both peace *and* conflict.”¹⁰⁷ This “co-constitution” cannot be grasped by studying *just* intervention.

Part I of the thesis started with a dissatisfaction of how the local is engaged with, represented, and theorised. But in trying to make sense of phenomena uncovered in Part II, it was faced not only with varied and complex subjectivities that complicate any idea of the local that one might have, but it also uncovered multiple manifestations of the international and global that are implicated in the lived realities of my interlocutors. The above section has dealt with how to move beyond, if not reconcile, the different demands one might have from governmentality studies and to keep theorising in a way that is useful for making sense of

¹⁰⁷ Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’, 51. Emphasis added.

real world problems. This section, however, will argue that careful engagement with the social realities the intervention works in results in dislocating the intervention itself. Intervention then becomes only one of many manifestations of the global that are implicated in the making of everyday political realities.

Writing in 2006, Beatrice Pouligny warned that the intervention can never be understood on its own, saying that “[...] the action of international community can never be analysed in itself, it forms part of a local reality that grasps it partially, and that must be grasped.”¹⁰⁸ Another body of literature uses a sociological approach to challenge the usual frameworks that treat statebuilding *ahistorically*, and ignore the *international embeddedness* of non-Western societies. These approaches frame international statebuilding efforts as just one factor in broader processes of state formation, and seek to “account for under-researched aspects of statebuilding and to bring local societies back into the scholarly discussion.”¹⁰⁹ Different approaches have moved in this direction: post-liberal peace theories that would remain open to indigenous inputs and lead to hybrid outcomes, ethnographic approaches that promised easier access to local realities, and recent efforts at decolonising intervention.¹¹⁰

All of these approaches, however, are limited by their focus on the intervention itself. This section will point to the limitations of the concept of intervention through two points that build onto the issues that the thesis started with in Chapter 1 —locating agency on the side of the local, rather than the international; and connecting that agency to global processes. These two points relate to the three disruptions presented earlier: a multiplicity of subjects, heterogenous power, and expanded fields of visibility. In relation to the location of agency, the thesis shows that an explicit desire to uncover authentically local agency falls into the same trap of an international/local binary that was discussed earlier in the chapter. I will thus emphasise the impossibility of clear subject positions between the local and the international which are constitutive parts of intervention. In relation to the conceptualisation of that agency within the international, it will become clear that to account for the connectedness and coevalness of that agency, we have to look beyond the intervention itself.

a. Undoing the local and the international

The most obvious way in which the concept of intervention is problematised is unthinking its constitutive categories: the local that is intervened upon, and the international

¹⁰⁸ Pouligny, *Peace Operations Seen from Below*, 272.

¹⁰⁹ Bliesemann de Guevara, ‘Introduction: The Limits of Statebuilding’, 118.

¹¹⁰ These literatures were discussed in Part I. For examples, see Richmond and Mitchell, *Hybrid Forms of Peace*; Millar, *An Ethnographic Approach to Peacebuilding*; Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*.

that intervenes. Projects examined in this thesis cannot be easily critiqued as “foreign” intervention into “domestic” matters—many of those I encountered are implemented and desired by Serbian elites *and* public. One thing that many critics of development, peacebuilding, or democracy promotion might easily forget is that the recipients of these projects, even though they are silenced and at times actively exploited in these endeavours, often actually *want* development, peace, and democracy. While these liberal ideals are easy to unpack theoretically, once faced with real life it is much harder to argue against wanting to end war, improve living conditions, build a more just government, or advocate respect for human rights.¹¹¹ Instead of wanting *less* intervention and *escaping* these projects, subjects I encountered were concerned with being *seen* by both international agencies and the Serbian state.¹¹² Trying not to just *give voice*, but to *learn from* the subjectivities targeted by interventions means also learning that such aspirations are not so easily dismissed as accidental products of modernity. They also represent projects that subjects are attached to. Swiftly discarding these subjects who are attached to ideas of progress and development as “co-opted” by neoliberalism, having a false consciousness, or just “shaped by neoliberal governmentality,” is then a limiting shortcut. It is more productive to explore how the things desired become considered foreign, and how the paths to getting them are limited by global narratives and local circumstances.

Projects that seek to build peace, development and democracy do not depend only on shaping subjects’ desires to fit the neoliberalisation of life, but also on a global project of casting those desires as *always already* liberal and foreign.¹¹³ This reading reifies these phenomena as endogenous products of the West, thus once again ignoring coevalness.¹¹⁴ For example, the entire region of Eastern Europe was diagnosed as lacking civil society, even though it was precisely civil society that ended communism.¹¹⁵ More practically, agricultural associations are now promoted in Serbia as something developed by the World Bank and FAO, even though associations were the founding pillar of Yugoslavian agriculture—

¹¹¹ See Li’s discussion of this in relation to development in Indonesian highlands. Li, *Land’s End*, 43.

¹¹² For a similar argument of wanting to be seen by the state in a different context in Serbia, see Greenberg and Spasić, ‘Beyond East and West’, 319.

¹¹³ The reading of these concepts as developing endogenously in Europe and then “spreading,” is fundamentally Eurocentric. For a discussion of terms such as nationalism in this light, see Bhabra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*, 22.

¹¹⁴ This argument holds both for identity making—i.e. the identities of the West were always made in the encounter with its Others, and in the actual historical development of liberalism and values associated with it that depended on casting its constitutive non-liberal aspects as always outside of it. Doty, *Imperial Encounters; Jahn, Liberal Internationalism*.

¹¹⁵ See the discussion and literature in Ch 4.

something that I heard again and again in tales of disbelief in interviews. When faced with governmental ideals, it is important to not buy into the divisions of local and foreign that are most easily available.¹¹⁶ By considering things like peace or justice as always *external* to societies in question, we remain trapped in thinking about local societies as somehow naturally prone to conflict and war—we are once again victims of the same politics of scale that we are supposed to question.

A different issue, however, arises once we look into imagined paths to desired goals. When talking to very different people in Serbia, I was always faced with entrenched feelings of inferiority in relation to the imagined West. Such strong attachments to both projects of modernisation and the positionalities implied in them—namely the backward receiver and the enlightened intervener—were perhaps the most painfully obvious part of my fieldwork. The most horrible insults to the government and the most deprecating descriptions of segments of the population unable to become “civilised” were not presented to me by foreign NGO workers or employees of the World Bank. On the contrary, these diagnoses were voiced by domestic NGO workers, the liberal youth, the new emerging “modernised right,” and repeated on the streets in the most casual conversations.

My fieldwork constantly reminded me of this hierarchy. In banal situations, like first introductions, in which my British affiliation automatically gave me an air of competence and impartiality, and everyday conversations about anything from public transport, hygiene, and recycling—I was faced with the same comparisons of “here” in malfunctioning Serbia, and “there” in the functioning West. The same division was obvious in ways in which critics of government imagined alternatives that always relied on the “ways things are done out there,” “European values,” and visions of “how they do it in *normal* countries.” These phrases capture the inability to think of ways of getting the things mentioned above outside of the paths prescribed by the global intervention apparatus. Peace, development, and progress are presented as developing and arriving *externally*.

The relationship of the tutee and the tutor is a powerful regime with multiple dimensions. One dimension manifests in the intervention seeing its targets as backward, but

¹¹⁶ An issue that remains unexplored here is the temporal novelty that we also expect in the narratives of transition and intervention. In the Yugoslavian example, we expect a story of repressive communism to neoliberalisation. However, Yugoslavia started the process of neoliberalisation in the 1980s when it became the first experiment in shock therapy (and even before that with its experiments with market economy). Similarly, the seeming novel technique of governing through freedom is complicated once we take seriously worker self-management which was the founding principle of Yugoslavian socialism. While there is no space to explore these continuities further, it is important to emphasise the relevance of continuities, rather than disjunctures.

another dimensions is visible in those same targets seeing themselves in that light. It is impossible to understand the relationship causally, but new tools are necessary to better appreciate how interventions do not translate only practices, ideas, and values, but also the *hierarchies* of political value and knowledge that further naturalise the tutee position.¹¹⁷

The observation of imaginations trapped in the hierarchies that they should be criticizing is not unique to this thesis. In discussing peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kappler similarly notes that she:

“[...] regularly found Bosnians telling [her] they thought that their own society needed external help or was incapable of bringing about change. This is often linked to the assumption that the conflict at stake was a result of deficient local structures, and a lack of local capacity to prevent the occurrence of violence. Such assumptions can be found in different types of research, by both outsiders and insiders.”¹¹⁸

Likewise, the path from Serbian reality to an imagined “normalcy is overdetermined by the same assumptions that underline the projects explored in this thesis. Most obviously, this erases the distinction between the “bad” international and the “good” local — intervention projects these days are run by locals themselves, and their desires for progress cannot be simply dismissed as “bad” or as “false consciousness.”¹¹⁹ To an extent, such thinking can be explained by the “projectivization of politics” discussed in detail in Chapter 4, but its power cannot be understood without referring to global hierarchies that structure the relationship between projects of government and their subjects

These global hierarchies are implied in most scholarship on intervention but stem from a much deeper running coloniality of contemporary power. For example, when defining intervention, John MacMillan talks about three “hierarchies of power that have generated logics and rationales for intervention over time.” These are Great Powers, economy, and culture (understood in “civilisational, racial and religious terms”).¹²⁰ In the same issue, however, Robbie Shilliam argues that these three are not free-standing phenomena, but stem from the positing of colonial and racial difference that police the distinction between sovereign and quasi-sovereign entities. His interpretation of intervention “highlights the fundamental importance of slavery and colonialism in the constitution of transnational social

¹¹⁷ Greenberg, *After the Revolution*, ll. 407–9 See also Chapter 3 in this thesis.

¹¹⁸ Kappler, ‘The Dynamic Local’, 879.

¹¹⁹ For the importance of not dismissing observations as “false consciousness,” see Li, *Land’s End*, 15–16.

¹²⁰ MacMillan, ‘Intervention and the Ordering of the Modern World’, 1045–46.

forces”¹²¹ This thesis contributes to the project of studying this difference and its embodiment in trans-scalar social forces in two ways. First, it explores how these transnational forces work in a region that is seemingly outside colonial dynamics. As Boatcă emphasises, even in its semi-peripheral position, the Balkan region reproduces European modernity as it strives to achieve it.¹²² And second, it showed that these transnational forces are both made in and make the everyday social realities around the world. This formulation has consequences for both politics and scholarship.

b. Undoing intervention as exclusive connection

If we are to try to “grasp local reality” or “repopulate IR,”¹²³ it is crucial that we more explicitly put into conversation not only the politics of intervention, but the larger context in which the intervention participates. In the case of improving Serbia, this meant not only recovering the local presence,¹²⁴ but also staying open to connections that might lead to structures *other than* the intervention.¹²⁵ While detailed studies of interventions have engaged with this,¹²⁶ we need to more explicitly name these connections. Using the concept of intervention as a defined field of action in which the local and international meet risks reading interventions as the only connection between the West and the Rest, thus once again denying the coevalness and connectedness of different geographical areas.¹²⁷

To explain the experience of young people I met in NFE, I had to look beyond the practices that brought us there. I had to look to unemployment as a discourse and as a material reality, I had to look more widely in the historical transformations of civil society in Serbia, I had to explain the silences as well as enunciations, and I had to expand my view beyond NFE as a practice of neoliberal governmentality that seeks to govern through

¹²¹ Shilliam, ‘Intervention and Colonial-Modernity’, 1133.

¹²² Boatcă, ‘The Quasi-Europes’, 136–37.

¹²³ Vradi, ‘The Strange Case of Ethnography and International Relations’, 65.

¹²⁴ For examples, see Pouligny, *Peace Operations Seen from Below*; Heathershaw, *Post-Conflict Tajikistan*; Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*; Rutazibwa, ‘Studying Agaciro’.

¹²⁵ Millar comes close to this when he talks about multiple interventions always happening at the same time, but I will try to emphasise that the connections transcend the usual conceptualisations of intervention. Millar, ‘Respecting Complexity’. Also, see Lai, ‘Transitional Justice and Its Discontents’, for an innovative connection between transitional justice, socioeconomic issues, and grassroots movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹²⁶ In regard to Serbia, this is done especially well in anthropologies of democracy promotion and civil society development, see Mikuš, ‘What Reform?’, Mikuš, ‘Public Advocacy in Serbia’, Mikuš, ‘“European Serbia” and Its “Civil” Discontents’, Vetta, ‘Let’s Get Up!’, Vetta, ‘“Democracy Building” in Serbia’.

¹²⁷ See Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*, 18. The lack of appreciation for the historical complexity of specific localities has been analysed by post-colonial scholars in their historiographical critiques which attacked the “European model” of history. They contest a narrative which always treats European modernity as the protagonist of change and everything else as just connected to it. See Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism’, 788–89; see also Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*.

freedom. In agriculture, I was similarly forced beyond the fields of visibility prescribed by a vision of intervention as EU accession. The stories of my interlocutors led me to structural inequalities, racist discourses, and land politics that were seemingly outside of my initial area of interest. It is these connections that politics of improvement captures.

ii. Politics of improvement

In discussing governmentality, Tania Li usefully offered three key concept that guided the analysis thus far: programs, practices, and effects of governing.¹²⁸ Her own work, however, is not concerned with intervention as imagined in traditional IR scholarship. She tracks the “will to improve” through projects she calls *improvement schemes*.¹²⁹ They range from different colonial administrations, rural development and conservation projects, to World Bank programs that promote accountability and transparency. The important thing to note is that understanding *any* of them means putting *all* of them in conversation “as they have layered up one upon the next and intersected with other processes to shape the landscapes, livelihoods, and identities of the [...] population.”¹³⁰ This is the crucial lesson for intervention scholarship: if we are to take into account *effects* as they are lived, we are forced to look beyond the definition and scales of international intervention. I suggest we do this by examining *politics of improvement* as they unfold around different subjects and policy fields.

Using this concept requires some clarification. By using the word “improvement” I am in no way making a statement about the true or otherwise motives behind the practices I explore. Nor am I trying to judge their results and decide whether measurable improvement is the outcome of any specific intervention or larger program. The concept allows me to trace different programs that are presented as improvement. What unites these projects is not the definition of an actor or delimitation of fields of action, but a teleological understanding of progress and the belief in human agency to facilitate this progression. It is where the *will to govern* and the *will to improve* intersect and open as a political field of study—it is precisely this will that unites projects from colonial administration to contemporary peacebuilding, statebuilding, and development efforts.

The analytical strength of politics of improvement lies in remaining open to their wider effects, which are not confined to the purported or otherwise goals, but the result of “layering” from the above quote. By drawing the concept from Li’s *will to improve*, I hope to

¹²⁸ Li, ‘Governmentality’, 280.

¹²⁹ Li, *The Will to Improve*.

¹³⁰ Li, 3.

open up interventions as parts of larger programs, or *improvement schemes*, that order things as varied as international interventions and investment plans, to personal life choices.¹³¹ Additionally, and in contrast to Li's approach, I also identify everyday actors not only as *objects* of the will to improve, but its *agents* that actively engage practices of improvement. This re-conceptualisation allows me to go beyond the two constitutive limitations of intervention highlighted in the previous section: the local-international dichotomy and thinking of other connections. Following the will to improve as it unfolds and engages different subjects, points to much more than the intervention that makes the politics of improvement.

a. Subject positions along horizontal and vertical lines

"The tragedy here is that we have all been led, knowingly or not, willingly or not, to see and to accept that image [distorted by Eurocentrism which renders us partial] as our own reality and ours only. Because of it, for a very long time, we have been what we are not, what we never should have been and what we will never be. And because of it, we can never catch our real problems, much less solve them, except in only a partial and distorted way."¹³²

It is now a truism that categories of local-international should not be essentialized nor romanticised, but it still remains to be seen how to actually conduct empirical and theoretical practice without them. I argue that this is possible by exploring projects of *improvement*, as projects in which many different subjects are engaged, rather than *interventions* that rely on dichotomized accounts of subject positions. The above section showed how these positions were complicated in the thesis' empirical practice. This section will show how thinking these contradictions through politics of improvement might open up new avenues for research. The first consideration is that complicating the local-international binary does not mean doing away with hierarchies that are constitutive of improvement schemes. All of these projects "depend on, as they confirm, a hierarchy that separates trustees from the people whose capacities need to be enhanced, or behaviours corrected."¹³³ This section argues that understanding the powerful work of this hierarchy means investigating what Obad refers to as horizontal and vertical axes.¹³⁴ It is along these axes that colonial difference is translated.

The above described process of personal attachment to global dreams shapes both the end goal of improvement, but it also translates its hierarchies to very personal

¹³¹ Li, chap. Introduction.

¹³² Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', 222.

¹³³ Li, *The Will to Improve*, 278.

¹³⁴ Obad, 'How We Survived Europe'.

subjectivation. In decolonial scholarship, it is, in Quijano's words above, "to see and to accept that image as our own reality and ours only". More specifically, Alexander Kiossev developed the concept of *self-colonisation* to describe situations of "hegemony without domination" and "cultures [that have] succumbed to the cultural power of Europe and the west without having been invaded and turned into colonies in actual fact."¹³⁵ Boatcă similarly discusses imperial difference as not only shaping the "socioeconomic organization" of Eastern Europe, but also the "*self*-conceptualisation of its subjects."¹³⁶

While powerfully connecting the issues of subjectivity to the colonial difference that structures improvement, these concepts can also be read as deceptively linear and complete. Self-colonisation implies a finished process, and subjugation renders the target once again silent and passive. Without denying the importance of these concepts, it is useful to turn to anthropologists who have explored these relationships as a more active process of everyday navigation of social life. Stef Jansen finds similar self-positioning in his discussions of everyday orientalism in Serbia and Croatia in which terms like the Balkans and Europe were employed as "discursive material for connecting personal narratives with more general narratives of war and nationalism" and enabled distancing from experiences of war that were crucial for everyday functioning.¹³⁷ In another specific case study of Serbian and Bosnian perceptions of the ability to travel under the strict visa regime before Serbia entered the "white Schengen"¹³⁸ system in December 2009, Jansen refers to "everyday geopolitical discourse" as "a routine, non-official mode of representation of one's collective place in the contemporary world" that helps us see how the "geopolitical becomes personal."¹³⁹ Obad tracks similar processes when exploring how geopolitical hierarchies work in Europeanisation in Croatia, both on the level of high politics, among the EU negotiators, and in everyday discourse.¹⁴⁰ A more thorough understanding of this *everyday geopolitical positioning* is crucial for any effort to make sense of processes and experiences of subjectivation. Even though they are everyday, the action explored in this thesis "call into being" already discussed hierarchies of Great Powers, economy, and culture.¹⁴¹ This experiential approach

¹³⁵ Kiossev, 'The Self-Colonizing Metaphor'.

¹³⁶ Boatcă, 'The Quasi-Europes', 134. Emphasis added. See also Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*.

¹³⁷ Jansen, 'Everyday Orientalism', 34.

¹³⁸ "White Schengen" refers to the white list issued by the EU that lists countries who are not in the Schengen area or the EU, but do not require visas to enter the EU.

¹³⁹ Jansen, 'After the Red Passport', 821, 824.

¹⁴⁰ Obad, 'How We Survived Europe'.

¹⁴¹ I borrow the formulation of three hierarchies and the colonial difference that underwrites them from article by MacMillan and Shilliam already discussed in this Chapter. MacMillan, 'Intervention and the Ordering of the Modern World'; Shilliam, 'Intervention and Colonial-Modernity'.

allows us to better appreciate how colonial difference makes and is made in everyday subjects. The transnational social forces mentioned above are not abstract notions reserved for state or international politics. They are also formed in and from everyday social worlds and the interactions in it.

The hierarchies through which the intervention works, and which work through the intervention, are not isolated, they are permanent, and malleable, social structures around which individuals develop their understandings of self and others. The dynamic of *protagonismo* that Sabaratnam identifies and that sees donors as always inserting themselves into policy narratives to always and again confirm Western agency¹⁴² is not found only in the narratives of the interveners. In my experience, it is not just the interveners who wanted to insert *themselves*, it is also the recipients of aid, officials and the general public, who expected projects to be legitimized and materially supported *externally*. Everyone involved becomes implicated in the hierarchies of the will to improve and soon there can be no political action outside of “projects,” and any “project” requires international, in many cases meaning only foreign, approval for legitimacy. Teasing apart here means going beyond noting the Orientalising and self-Orientalising discourses to ask how they structure local realities.¹⁴³ In the above observation by Kappler, there is no attempt to move *beyond* just observation. What are the sources of these assumptions about “needing external help” and being “incapable of bringing about change?” And what might be their consequences? To answer those questions, we must start revealing connections and complex interactions of hierarchy that make politics of improvement.

Importantly, it is not enough to write *against* the West anymore, because the colonial difference also structures the relationships outside the West/non-West. I might have been shocked to hear someone differentiate Serbia from the “black countries” in which land grabbing is usual, but the differentiation is not surprising itself. There is a growing literature on internal, or nesting orientalism, that explains how the colonial difference is not used only in self-identification as an inferior to the West, but also as a *superior* to the East that always

¹⁴² *Protagonismo* is identified as being “about a political relation in which intervention is understood as a kind of space for actualising the identities of specific interveners and their world views, rather than working towards a common agenda set by the government or community.” Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention*, 80.

¹⁴³ An important thing to note is that the self-orientalising discourse is also reproduced in academia. For a detailed engagement with these discourses, see Mikuš, “European Serbia” and Its “Civil” Discontents; Thiemann, ‘State Relations’, 99.

somehow begins *there*, not *here*.¹⁴⁴ The same lines that separate “us” from the more developed, are employed to distance “us” from the less developed.

While the situations in the Balkans and in post-colonial state are not in any way the same, this thesis has shown how lessons on the workings of hierarchy that the scholarship from those locations inspires can explain things that Western modernisation, transition, and democratisation theories cannot grasp. More than trans-regional academic production, this kind of attachment has profound consequences for political praxis. When my interviewee juxtaposes Serbia to African victims of land-grabbing, she is not only refusing to learn from the experiences of similar techniques employed in Africa, but her imagined solutions remain trapped in the same paradigm that is driving land grabbing in the first place—namely the bifurcation of the world in those with the right to make endless profits on land, and those who cannot defend their rights. This is the challenge that any discussions of local political practice and resistance have to take on.

Besides the already discussed literature on nesting orientalisms, there is a growing literature that seeks to situate local subjectivities within global coloniality.¹⁴⁵ Kilibarda analyses how the Otpor! democracy warriors were heavily invested in whiteness—this automatically limiting their claim to modernity with its “darker” side of racialized coloniality.¹⁴⁶ Growing research on the Non-Aligned Movement and Yugoslav self-management socialism is discovering their investment in teleological understandings of development.¹⁴⁷ These translations happen in the everyday, but they are geopolitical horizontal gradations—judging nations and cultures on their closeness to Europe. In discussing different forms of resistance in chapters 4 and 5, I have similarly tried to emphasise the limitations of political practice that remains in the confines of the paradigm that marginalise it in the first place.

Going beyond these scalar identity markers allows a fuller appreciation of Obad’s horizontal and vertical axes discussed earlier in the chapter. Understanding the power of hierarchies in agricultural improvement is impossible if we remain subscribed to ideas of local and international that are supposed to embody this difference—writing *against* EU policies will not comprehend how the individual producers, and the political action they

¹⁴⁴ Bakić-Hayden, ‘Nesting Orientalisms’.

¹⁴⁵ Razsa and Lindstrom, ‘Balkan Is Beautiful’.

¹⁴⁶ Kilibarda, ‘Non-Aligned Geographies in the Balkans’.

¹⁴⁷ For NAM, see Subotić and Vučetić, ‘Performing Solidarity’; and Kilibarda, ‘Non-Aligned Geographies in the Balkans’; for a discussion of Praxis, a distinctive Yugoslav Marxist humanism, see Karkov, ‘Decolonizing Praxis in Eastern Europe’.

engage in, are made by the same hierarchies that they seek to challenge. To understand local experiences, political practice, and try to grasp the realities that are so implicated in global imaginations, it is not enough to expose the internalisation of colonial difference as feelings of inadequacy, but also to tease apart ways in which it inspires new systems of oppression. I hope this to be only the beginning of this research.

b. Coevalness

While this focus on connections has already been argued for elsewhere,¹⁴⁸ I want to focus on two aspects that a more open view allows: an appreciation of changes far more banal than large scale dispossession or highly visible UN peacebuilding operations, and a more meaningful engagement with subjects in their full complexity as political actors. First, a focus on connections beyond and around intervention opens the door for discussion of processes that are far less shocking than many critical scholars would lead us to expect. Tania Li emphasises this point strongly when she says that the emergence of capitalist relations which brought with them dramatic dispossession were decidedly *undramatic*—they were much more mundane and everyday.¹⁴⁹ Neoliberalisation in Serbia is similarly mundane. The youth are not targeted by either disciplinary techniques or simply fostered through freedom into responsibilized subjects. They are slowly formed through a variety of social forces and guided towards believing in very specific form of progress—specific visions of what a successful young adult is, the promises of agriculture, ideals of work and discipline, and promises of meritocracy. Similarly, the land deals in Serbia that I explored are missing the dramatic evictions that accompany land grabs in Africa and Asia. They are a product of a much slower and less exciting process of years of industrial decline, rising corruption, and tolerance of an increasingly authoritarian government.

And perhaps most importantly, resistance is then also less spectacular. All the subjects I spoke to are very well aware of the real problems they are facing, and often they look to be recognised by governmental practices, rather than to hide from them.¹⁵⁰ The resistance I uncovered is more complicated than any theoretical framework allows: what exactly people resist, and how, is contextual and always both already shaped by the forces being resisted, and pregnant with the possibility of radical change.

¹⁴⁸ Bhabra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*.

¹⁴⁹ Li, *Land's End*, 9.

¹⁵⁰ Li similarly observes that the highlanders she spoke to were perfectly aware of their poverty and wanted to change their situation. Li, 179.

Second, more than just looking outside of the intervention, we have to allow our interlocutors to determine their own categories that sometimes go beyond the analytical confines of our research. Labelling actors as *just* “development actors”, “peacebuilders,” or “democracy actors” substantially alters how we might interpret their actions. While others have already criticized how the local is always seemingly concerned with the *everyday*, while the international remains the *political* actor,¹⁵¹ this needs to be even more strongly emphasised.

In my fieldwork, this was perhaps most obvious when attending the *Youth for Peace* workshop that I retold in the Introduction. Throughout the week, we were interested in discussing Yugoslavia in ways that concerned us—people born close to its death. We were not interested in learning about techniques of negotiation and border dispute resolutions, nor were we entertained by trying to develop abstract peace agreements for made up countries—we wanted to talk about “post-conflict” as an experience, not as a concept. Post-conflict there, without ever being labelled as such, meant wanting to talk about how promises of capitalism seemed removed from the realities in our countries, how democracy was reduced to party politics precisely through the peace agreement that we were supposed to now study in the abstract, and how peace means very little when we are a generation that is shaped only by the war’s aftermath. In other words, we did not understand ourselves as “peacebuilders” limited to the issues of ethnicity and borders that we were steered toward, but we considered ourselves political subjects, interested in locating our everyday problems within a political system not bound to any particular scale. Instead of focusing either on “ancient hatreds” or more recent “ethnic tensions,” we considered ourselves “as competent contemporaries caught up in complex problems of a wholly modern kind.”¹⁵²

Thinking back to this first encounter of my fieldwork, I cannot help feeling that this is the ultimate limitation of intervention scholarship—that it reduces the subjects to nothing more than the targets of those interventions, even when it tries to grasp their realities and experiences. It is precisely because of my own reliance on the conceptual confines of intervention—most visible in approaching my interlocutors as targets—that the disruptions that animate this chapter emerged. Being interested in political subjectivities involved in different improvement projects forced me to move beyond such conceptualisation and allow these actors to exist in a myriad of different ways, even when it led my research to things seemingly incompatible with a project on international intervention. And finally, being

¹⁵¹ Nadarajah and Rampton, ‘The Limits of Hybridity’; Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism’.

¹⁵² Li, *Land’s End*, 166.

labelled as a peacebuilder when I definitely did not feel like one, allowed me to feel a part of that limitation myself.¹⁵³

Conclusions

This chapter has argued that the efforts to locate political agency on the side of the local rather than the international, and to conceptualise it as connected to, but not overdetermined by, international power, are doomed to fail if we remain with the conceptual confines of intervention. In the Introduction, we identified three characteristics of interventions that are implicit in scholarship that studies them: they depend on the separation of the intervener from those intervened upon along the local/international or domestic/foreign lines, they are considered as “discreet acts” that unfold in predefined orders and fields, and they are done to promote liberalism in places that lack it. This chapter has shown that in order to engage subjectivities that are targeted by intervention, we have to move beyond all three dimensions of that definition.

This problematisation is captured in two moves that dislocate intervention: complicating subject positions and emphasising coevalness. Instead of the local and the international we see a multiplicity of differently situated subjects. Instead of discreet acts we are invited to see coevalness that goes beyond the intervention itself. And finally, this coevalness prevents easy divisions between liberal and illiberal parts of the world. As a way out the conceptual confines of intervention, the chapter presented the concept of *politics of improvement* — a notion which allows us to more fully engage local experiences and learn from them.

In doing so, the chapter intervenes in two specific debates through a discussion of scale. The first one relates to a perceived tension between a focus on experiential critique that prioritises the subjectivities of our interlocutors, and a more structural approach that centres on power and institutions that make those subjectivities. The second refers to a debate on the nature of rule: in general, and as promoted in non-military international interventions. While the nature of rule is usually relatively clearly defined on a scale from liberal to non-liberal, it was particularly important in studies of neoliberal governmentality that depend on formal freedom through which subjects are made, and therefore conduct

¹⁵³ An important caveat here is due: by forwarding an argument for a wider appreciation of subject positions and experiences, I am in no way buying into the illusion of being able to “represent,” “give voice,” or “faithfully document” the complexity of political subjectivities we encounter. A project that is forwarded here is a reflexive attempt, rather than conclusive recipe.

conducted. This dependence on formal freedom removed the international from discussion on governmentality due to its uneven nature, along with most non-Western places that have not developed into advanced liberal democracies.

Politics of improvement, and their insistence on unthinking scale and theorising connections, intervenes in both of these issues. In relation to the issue of the starting point of critique, it argues that all critique has to move scales, oscillate between theory and the field, and stretch beyond both structures and experiences that we are presented with. Instead of choosing a “flat ontology” or being committed to analysing capitalism, the chapter advocates a less conclusive, yet more ambitious effort of thinking big while practicing humility. It is *less* conclusive because it does not provide diagnoses of success or failure, nor recipes for doing things better in the short-run. Nevertheless, it is *more* ambitious because it challenges us to think together things that are usually kept separate—global hierarchies, international politics, and everyday experiences.

In relation to the debate on the nature of rule, it builds onto critiques of liberalism which see such separations—between the liberal rule of domestic relations and the lacking international, and between liberalism in the West and its illiberal outside—as reifying the liberal order and the exclusions and hierarchies that it entails. By complicating scale, it is obvious that any neat separation of the domestic and the international is impossible. One makes the other, and thus any account of power on a global level has to take into account both.¹⁵⁴ By emphasising coevalness—connections between the West and its outside as going far beyond the intervention that makes one part of it—the chapter builds onto scholarship that argues *against* treating these spaces as *outside* liberalism. Such a view obscures the way that liberalism depends on creating its other—from early liberal political theory that depended on colonialism, to its current practices of nurturing subjects into modernity only to forever trap them as cheap labour for the production of modernity that belongs elsewhere.

In this chapter, it becomes apparent that learning *from* the experiences of subjects of intervention necessarily moves beyond intervention itself. As we stop considering these people as only targets of interventions, we are invited to contemplate the complex politics

¹⁵⁴ Because I do not understand them causally, as one *influencing* the other, I stay away from literature that has tackled similar issues through studying *interaction* of two already existing levels: local/domestic and global/international. Even though these literatures provide important insight into many issues, they also work with an implicit understanding of levels as pre-existing the analysis of their interaction. Two bodies of literature are especially relevant. One is the second image reversed literature inspired by Gourevitch which discusses how domestic politics affect the international system, and the other is the EU normative power which studies the encounters between EU norms and local contexts. See Gourevitch, ‘The Second Image Reversed’; Björkdahl, *Importing EU norms*; Noutcheva, ‘Fake, Partial and Imposed Compliance’.

that they navigate—how international politics descend into everyday lives, and how global power is made by individual decisions and dispositions. Moreover, this reorientation to thinking intervention and IR more generally *from here* helps us analyse international politics differently: as coeval, contemporaneous, and approachable through the lives of those usually not mentioned in IR textbooks. While situated in scholarship on intervention, the work done here has implications for a variety of literatures and efforts to produce knowledge—topics that will be pursued in the Conclusion.

Conclusion

At a dinner party towards the end of my PhD I was asked what exactly I study about the Balkans. I resorted to my easy answer: international intervention. By this time, I was fully aware of this answer's failure to "change the subjects" of my study. In this formulation, I was still focusing on intervention, rather than on the experiences of the people living and breathing in spaces where interventions are launched. I ignored the slight feeling of discomfort, but another person at the table was fast to laugh off my seemingly easy answer, "ha, international intervention, the *one thing* that we all study in this region!" And it is true, the majority of English language literature about the Balkans seems to be interested in how the international intervenes in the local: what the EU does, how the local community complies or resists these measures, how opinions towards NATO change, etc. While the politics of funding and knowledge production could also explain topic selection around the Balkans, I think there is more to it. As critiques of Eurocentrism in knowledge production have shown, the knowledge produced in international academia gives agency to the international—the agency of those doing the improving, rather than those being improved.¹ This thesis started from the observation made by decolonial critiques of IR: IR is written about the West and from the perspective of the West, and the people living the reality of interventions are nothing else than "targets."

The simple answer that I had at the restaurant that night is that people in the Balkans, or in (semi-)peripheries more generally, cannot escape the realisation that everything they experience is an intervention of the international into their lives. From judicial reforms to personal choices about employment and migration, there is no issue that can sustain the veneer of isolation, no issue that can escape the need for catching up, no issue that is separated from what Li called the "will to improve." Now, I do not believe that this imposition of the international on all aspects of life is different anywhere else—the global flows of ideas, capital, and people shape and have been shaping all corners of the world. But what is distinct about places that are outside of what we imagine as the West/North is that their view is directed to a goal that is not only *absent* from locations in the (semi-) peripheries,

¹ Tickner, 'Seeing IR Differently'.

but is actually *present* in others. To paraphrase József Böröcz, goodness, and I would add progress, is *elsewhere*.² And the road to that progress is paved with projects that seek to empower and modernise, enable and build. It is paved with interventions in which programmers diagnose who is improvable, and design policies to help them. That was the starting point of this thesis: a wonder at the naturalised division between those who have peace, development, and democracy, and those who feel they lack them. Alongside realising the ubiquity of the division, I also had the feeling that the projects which engage this line are similarly omnipresent: judicial reforms, human rights schools, civil society trainings, summer camps, trade deals, technical assistance, reconstruction funds, and many others. These projects operate on all scales, target all aspects of life, and touch almost everyone. How they touch subjects is the question that animated this thesis.

If I was allowed a longer answer that night, I would have said that I study how everyday lives are made in the intersection of scales, powers, and subjects. I wanted to discover the ways in which international intervention intersects with local contexts as it lands around the world, how it changes while it is changed, how it traverses and shapes, how its friction has a life of its own every time we invoke stability, markets, democracy, or progress.³ I would say I explore how international intervention is made “our own,” how it is translated, stolen from policy documents, and turned into a structure that orients our actions and desires. I study the experience of “being improved.”

I Chapter summary

The thesis started with asking how we can approach subjectivities targeted by intervention and what we might learn by doing so. In response, it identified the limits of current approaches to local subjectivities and developed its own methodological and analytical approach. It practiced that approach in two empirical fields, and it discussed some analytical and methodological insights developed from the findings.

Part I of the thesis contextualised the research question by emphasising the connection between subjectivities and forms of government, it reviewed some efforts to engage subjectivities that have been forwarded within IR thus far, and in conversation with their limitations developed my own analytical and methodological framework for doing so.

² Böröcz, ‘Goodness Is Elsewhere’.

³ My reference to friction is to Tsing, *Friction*.

Chapter 1 brought to fore the “valorisation of the local” that has marked both practice and scholarship surrounding interventions. My own interest in the experiences of the targets is very much in line with the larger developments in practice and scholarship surrounding the local turn. However, the chapter problematised this literature in two ways. First, it challenged the novelty of the local turn by emphasising the long-term connection between subjectivities and government. This re-formulation raised the stakes of the research question by highlighting the link between local subjectivities and forms of rule that engage them. Second, the chapter defined specific shortcomings of the current approaches to the local. One is the *location* of agency, which is usually placed within the international, rather than the local. And the other is the *embeddedness* of local agency in international politics and the fact that we see intervention not only as the first engagement of the local with the international, but also as the only one. These two issues animate the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 2 presented governmentality as a lens able to appreciate this connection between subjectivities and government. However, the chapter also presented critiques of governmentality studies which accuse it of erasing agency with its sole focus on power, and of erasing structures by its focus on capillary power and how it is practiced. Most importantly, governmentality pays insufficient attention to both agencies and structures that fall outside of government rationalities, which leads to an erasure of politics, contestations, and messiness that are constitutive of government as a lived experience.⁴ To ameliorate some of these problems, the chapter turned to ethnography as a methodology that allows access to the contingency that is usually erased from top-down studies. Moreover, the ethnographic orientation of the study used governmentality as a lens that focuses more on the subjectivity-side of governing, rather than its rationality.

The chapter drew from two loose bodies of literature—studies of international governmentality and anthropological discussions on the local. The fields are complementary: while IR moved downward through a focus on ethnography and practice in an effort to go beyond its fetishizing of “the international,” anthropology tried to move upwards beyond treating “the native” as an object isolated from the international. These discussions addressed the concerns of Chapter 1. Governmentality studies often fail to appreciate the *location* of political agency outside of the international because they focus on what is developed behind

⁴ As already mentioned in Chapters 2 and 6, this project is also an effort to think about the way agency and structure are approached in IR. However, while remaining aware of the rich literature that approaches this problem conceptually within IR and more generally, the thesis provides a contribution as an example of empirical and analytical practice of thinking them together.

closed doors of supra-national bodies. On the other hand, ethnographic and other works that have turned to the local have a hard time conceptualising the local's *embeddedness* within the international. Instead of offering a conclusive recipe, the chapter put the two literatures in conversation and thus provided ways to think about anticipated methodological and analytical issues.

Part II went on to practice this framework. It started by situating Serbia in Chapter 3 and went on to use governmentality as a guide for exploring how individual subjectivities are engaged by interventions in two fields in which various international projects target local transformation: non-formal youth education and agricultural governance.

In the area of non-formal youth education, three subjects targeted by various NGOs and different European and US political foundations invoked different critiques of governmentalisation. These were the *democratic guerrillas* who needed direct funding without many strings attached, the *political children* who were invited to learn how to be politically active through building civil society capacities, and finally, *the unemployed youth* that were encouraged to learn how to invest in themselves in order to finally become a part of the “normal” international society. Following the temporal narration presented in Chapter 4, governmentalisation goes from giving money unconditionally, to slowly attaching conditions that guide, rather than coerce, subjects into becoming neoliberal citizens. These images were reconstructed for me in interviews and conversations, but the most obvious governmental techniques were discussed during workshop breaks, chats with participants, and conversations with young adults across Serbia and the region. These techniques required my interlocutors to turn themselves into enterprises in the form of continuous rankings, calls, and applications. Governmentality here points to the importance of concepts like entrepreneurialism, individualism, and responsabilisation.

The chapter expanded this view of governmental practice and its economizing effect in two ways. First, the chapter highlighted that these individualising techniques both take part in and reflect a larger re-conceptualisation of the citizen, civil society, and the state. These changes were reflected in the ways that NFE and civil society developed. To demonstrate this, I built on ethnographies of civil-society-building in Serbia and Eastern Europe in order to argue that this translation resulted in *projectivized politics*. These projectivized politics use proceduralism and economism to purify politics of Balkan backwardness and socialist legacies, and usher them into the promised era of neoliberal capitalist modernity.

Second, the chapter paid attention to activation practices as well as to silences present. I observed these in the youth-produced document on unemployment, as well as in discussions about vocational education that were present both within the document and in the organisations I spoke with. In these settings, youth are not supposed to be striving for more, but are instead re-conceptualised as subjects who need to practice their market rationalities by getting factory employment through vocational education or by migrating out of the country. It is this heterogeneity of scales, subjects, and power that is pursued further in Chapter 6.

In agricultural governance explored in Chapter 5, the contemporary intervention implies the simultaneous transformation of three distinct subjects: the public servants that expected to transform the state along neoliberal lines using new institutionalism, the farmers themselves who are led to become entrepreneurs more responsive to the market, and the civil society that is supposed to participate in and mediate between the two. Governmentality here is embodied in the subjects created in the project of agricultural modernisation. The public servants should competitively invest in themselves as human capital as they strive to build better institutions; the farmers should learn to respond better to market needs through innovation and adaptation to accomplish profits; and civil society should be there to both provide services abandoned by the state and to mediate between the state and the citizens.

However, the ethnographic orientation of the study brought out two elements that would be missing from typical accounts of intervention. First, it uncovered the wider effects of intervention techniques that cannot be subsumed in the narrative of a successful or failed subject creation. It discussed issues like brain drain, experiences of working in the public sector, and the division between those producers who are expected to become entrepreneurs and those who are expected to disappear. These observations showed that tracking how government is rationalised is not enough to understand the experience of being improved. Instead, the chapter looked beyond programmes and practices of government and explored their wider effects. This did not only uncover experiences like the brain drain that complicate efforts of government, but it also pointed to the more implicit division between subjects who are approached by productive power and expected to improve, and those that are erased from policy and expected to be silent. Second, the chapter investigated land policy as a field which structures all other policies in agriculture (and thus the experiences of any intervention) but is technically removed from the concerns of the EU. In doing so, the chapter's focus on subjectivity led beyond the fields of visibility prescribed by intervention itself.

Part III of the thesis stepped out of the field to see what might be learned from the thesis' empirical practice. Chapter 6 pointed to disruptions that made me re-consider the constitutive concepts of the thesis. The disruptions refer to different subject positions, power relations, and fields of visibility that the empirical work highlighted, but that could not be subsumed under the narratives of intervention in the name of neoliberal governmentality. Specifically, Chapter 6 highlighted how both subjects and power are found in unexpected places, shapes, and scales.

Subjects are problematised by stressing how the construction of the difference between Balkan subjects that need improving and their modern improvers gets translated internally within what we would consider "the local population." This complicates the idea of governmentality working towards making the *homo oeconomicus* a universal anthropological fact. Instead, it is a very particular schema that works along other, more implicit subjectifications that visualize people making peace with their deteriorating situations, rather than being empowered.

The concept of power was similarly unpacked. In this context, it could not be dispersed, subtle, and nurturing. Sometimes it was direct, determining who has the right to hope for a better life, and who does not. In its field of action, power became wider. Narratives of past projects still echoed in talks about markets, modernisation, and progress. This layering of projects beyond the official target goals permeated spheres of life seemingly removed from them.

The fields of visibility prescribed by power itself were challenged as the thesis moved into personal lives of youth and their stories of migration and employment. In agriculture, it investigated how land policy is made at the intersection of local desires and global flows, and showed what a rich life the narratives of intervention have beyond the intervention itself.

In making sense of these different understandings of the interaction between subjects and power, it became clear that my focus on the local was not enough. In the stories I tracked, I faced not only multifaceted local identities that could not be confined to an understanding of the local as offered in the local turn, but also an expression of the global and international that went beyond what my framework was prepared for. The international stopped being "above" everyday experience; it stopped being separate. It had a life of its own, not just in UN offices and EU missions, but in everyday lives. The people who I spoke to were navigating realities of late "transition," and looking for their place in the world.

These observations challenge the way we think about scale, and accordingly the chapter moved to distil different conceptions of scale. First, scale is discussed as identity,

which brings with it the binaries that juxtapose the traditional/illiberal/feminine/barbaric local to the modern/liberal/masculine/civilised global. However, scale also emerges in governmentality studies in a different way. Most notably, it emerges in debates around what exactly is governed by governmentality: individuals, populations, states, or the international? Lastly, scale surfaces around the expectations of our frameworks. Governmentality and ethnography are often relegated to a lower scale of explanation: governmentality because of its supposed commitment to a flat ontology, and ethnography because of its emphasis on the experiential critique. The discussion offered in Chapter 6 stepped outside of these debates to argue that conceptual clarity regarding scale might actually hurt, rather than help, our analyses. While it is important to stay attentive to the hierarchies implied in using the terms of local and global/international, and to discuss the politics of scale and how issues are cast at different levels of governance, it is also counter-productive to insist on an ontological separation of levels that would allow power *or* subjects to be contained to a specific scale. These conceptions of scale are themselves products of power, and as such, cannot be taken for granted.

Such recasting of scale makes it possible to approach issues ethnographically, and simultaneously remain committed to learning about global processes. It allows us to navigate between understanding local experiences as mere expressions of global power and seeing them as removed from it. It allows us to see people as always the products of both their immediate environments, and of their global positionings—subjectivity is seen as not only experiential, but intimately connected to world politics.⁵ This has a direct consequence for the local turn literature. As we stop seeing the local as an alternative to the global and see the local and the global as constitutive of each other and “calling each other into being,”⁶ it becomes impossible to rely on the local as a simple “solution” for problems of intervention.

Finally, drawing on the ways that power, subjects, and scale were problematised, Chapter 6 argued that the inability to resolve the issues of the location and embeddedness of agency is immanent to the concept of intervention itself. The three disruptions above go beyond the three defining characteristic of intervention: instead of discrete acts, we are forced to engage wider fields of action; instead of relying on the international intervening into the local, we locate a multiplicity of subjects that exist on multiple scales simultaneously;

⁵ As already discussed in Chapter 1, here I do not make use of the different conceptualisations of “the international” and “the global.” Throughout the thesis, these terms are used as concepts of scale: I do not restrict them to the system of nation-states, nor do I subscribe to overly optimistic readings of “the global” as a novel cosmopolitan world order.

⁶ Johnson, ‘Narrating Entanglements’, 385, 387.

and instead of liberalism as an ideal of freedom, we are faced with its heterogenous lived reality.

Drawing on Tania Li's work in *The Will to Improve*, the chapter presented the *politics of improvement* as a better conceptualisation of these processes. This conceptualisation helps us better appreciate the intersection of subjectivities and projects that target these subjectivities while promoting peace, development, and democracy. Politics of improvement involve a twofold shift: it approaches subjects and power beyond international/local binary, and it is attentive to trans-scalar connections outside the intervention itself—thus treating politics in different locations as coeval.

The remainder of the Conclusion will once again summarise the answer to the question of how to approach local subjectivities of international intervention, and what we might learn by doing so. It will distil specific contributions that this discussion makes to a variety of literatures. These contributions include emphasising the importance of subjectivity and coeval thinking in IR, intervening in the debate around the appropriateness and possibility of governmentality frameworks, and highlighting the real promises and tenuous expectations of ethnographic methodologies. Finally, I highlight the thesis' contribution to a specific reading of the Balkans with post-colonial and decolonial insights.

II Thesis argument and contributions

In answering the puzzle started in the Introduction, the thesis showed that we can approach subjectivities of those supposed to reap the benefits of international intervention by an ethnographic exploration of governmentality—reflexively studying the experiences of “being governed.” In doing so, we learned that the concept of intervention itself is limiting and will always be in tension with engaging experiences we are interested in. I argue that a more productive way of exploring the same processes might be through politics of improvement that do not depend on the usual scales of intervention.

However, because the thesis advocated approaching both the researched *and* the researcher reflexively, the previous chapters also engaged a series of concepts: subjectivity, governmentality, liberalism as a lived reality, and post-colonial and decolonial contributions to studying IR. An aspect of ethnographic humility that the thesis advocates is treating these concepts not as finished “things” that we are free to employ, but allowing them to be in constant conversation with both our own expectations and observations from the field—this is meant by the imperative to think big by practicing humility. Because of this, the thesis

contributes to a range of literatures beyond intervention scholarship. The following section will highlight these contributions.

i. Studying interventions differently

Most obviously, studying these encounters as politics of improvement challenges the three defining features that the Introduction identified in the literature on international interventions: subject positions are more varied than that of local and the international, we cannot understand them by focusing on discrete acts, and instead of qualifying how liberal or illiberal their practices and outcomes are, we are invited to study liberalism as a lived reality. This changes both the objects and venues of critique. Most simply, the politics of improvement point to the less spectacular embodiments of international engagement with difference: there are no more bombings today in Serbia, there are no (direct) challenges to sovereignty, there are no white SUVs or secured international zones.⁷ What we see instead is a more ordinary, but vastly more pervasive process. We see liberalism as a lived reality that layers upon the Yugoslavian experiments with markets, corrupt transition, and IMF ideals. We see how the roles of the state, civil society, and individuals are constantly re-negotiated through projects that cannot be described as purely local or international. We see complex hierarchies that serve to simultaneously position individuals within global geopolitics and local communities, and that aim at nothing less than normalising the level of hope that each individual is entitled to. These processes are not new exciting encounters with liberalism or spectacular instances of neoliberal dispossession; they are not broadcast on TVs and they do not fill the pages of IR textbooks. Instead of pointing to disjunctures through which we are used to conceptualising change, they point to continuity. Instead of pointing to difference and separation of units, they point to coevalness. These transformations that politics of improvement can examine are more subtle, but no less important.

While the politics of improvement expand the range of critique to encompass more mundane aspects of political life, the re-conceptualisation could also be interpreted as halting critique. In arguing against the constitutive categories of intervention that I contend hide more than illuminate, there is a concern that getting rid of those categories will make the critique of international intervention more difficult. The majority of critical scholarship on intervention has focused precisely on the very real power imbalance that positions the local and the international in intervention—the international that intervenes in the local without

⁷ For a similar point in Li's work on land and the emergence of capitalist relations in Indonesia, see Li, *Land's End*, 3.

legitimacy, in the wrong ways, and with adverse consequences. Seeing these processes as a politics of improvement points to a more difficult venue of critique, where everyone is in some way implicated, everyone incorporated in similar matrices of power, and where there is no “pure” resistance or authenticity that would present an unproblematic alternative. To paraphrase Li, we are faced with a world in which there are enough victims, but no easily identifiable villains.⁸

The politics of improvement does not, however, preclude critique. Instead, it advocates a positional critique that is humble as it navigates between experiences of everyday people and the structures that make them, but that is also piercing as it avoids the straightforward divisions between the “good” and “bad.” In a way, it opens up the space to see that the “will to govern” is inevitable, but, as Li adds, it also creates space to examine the hierarchies of trusteeship that this will implies, and that we have to challenge.⁹

ii. Subjectivity and coevalness in IR

Another contribution of the thesis is an effort to change how we study “those being governed” in interventions.¹⁰ By focusing on subjectivities and how their experiences are made, the thesis included socio-economic questions to the usual “post-conflict” framing of the region. Moreover, it countered the depoliticisation brought by discourses that explain the failures of intervention by focusing on individual habits, mentalities, and norms. In Eastern Europe in general, and in Serbia in particular, the depoliticisation works not only through a focus on technocratic expertise and seemingly neutral economic theories, but it exports the very apparent failures to the subjectivities themselves. While it might be common in literature on the Balkans to focus on more spectacular issues of violence and war and ignore the reality of post-socialist economic transition, the socialist legacy is used to explain failures by invoking faulty values and norms. For example, attitudes toward public spending, a missing “entrepreneurial spirit,” and a general sense of entitlement are blamed for the failure to catch up with the West and the ideals that it stands for.¹¹ A focus on how subjectivities are engaged by the politics of improvement complicates these readings and leads to new questions.

⁸ Li, ‘Revisiting “The Will to Improve”’, 233.

⁹ Li, 234.

¹⁰ Stern, Hellberg, and Hansson, *Studying the Agency of Being Governed*.

¹¹ Jansen, ‘The Privatisation of Home and Hope’, 187. Makovicky, *Neoliberalism, Personhood, and Postsocialism*, especially the Introduction.

There are, however, issues that go beyond a more nuanced approach to subjectivity in studies of intervention. An image capable of including the quotidian enriches and even counteracts the “dehumanised” picture of IR that we are presented with: a picture populated by statesmen, high politics, experts, and interveners — people who we see as having political power, as opposed to everyone else.¹² The bifurcation between the local and the global supports this view. As Heather Johnson argues, it “reproduces and concretizes the division between elite and marginalized, the powerful who sustain the dominant narrative, and the subaltern, who are silenced within it.”¹³ Writing about the “everyday,” Michael Niemann and Matt Davies similarly point out that it is precisely this imaginary of the international as the realm of “those people” that prevents asking questions that would “allow individuals to uncover the linkages between global politics and their everyday lives.”¹⁴ My focus on subjectivities in international politics captured precisely these linkages: how both the international and its subjects are made and remade in the interaction of international interventions and their targets. By using governmentality to focus on the connection of everyday subjectivities and forms of government, the thesis sought to not only enrich the existing accounts of intervention, but to “place international political *life* in all its quotidian, connected, and conflicted aspects at the centre of our research agendas.”¹⁵ This life, even though threatened by closures via teleological narratives of development, market rationalities, or the invocation of universals and expertise, is nevertheless *political*: it is an arena of contestation where claims are made from situated locations, alliances formed based on differing interests, and unexpected lines that divide or unite emerge.¹⁶

Similarly to how political anthropology sought to find politics outside of the state and political parties, a project for which Foucault’s influence was crucial,¹⁷ a focus on subjectivity brings to fore the working of the international outside of high politics of states.¹⁸ Taken in this way, the experiences retold and interpreted in the preceding pages matter not only because they provide us with exciting new sites for studying concepts like intervention and neoliberal governmentality, but because they give us the opportunity to more fundamentally

¹² Vraști, ‘Universal but Not Truly “Global”’, 65; see also Davies and Niemann, ‘The Everyday Spaces of Global Politics’, 561.

¹³ Johnson, ‘Narrating Entanglements’, 384.

¹⁴ Davies and Niemann, ‘The Everyday Spaces of Global Politics’, 55.

¹⁵ Vraști, ‘Universal but Not Truly “Global”’, 68–69.

¹⁶ This vision of politics is in line with Walters, *Governmentality*, 80; Li, *The Will to Improve*, 23; Hindess, ‘Power, Government, Politics’.

¹⁷ Curtis and Spencer, ‘Anthropology and the Political’.

¹⁸ And outside the usual sites where we see the international challenged, like the refugee camp or transnational social movements.

ask how these things make the international into a lived reality. The international stops being something “outside.” We see it as something made in seemingly banal everyday situations—it happens across multiple scales simultaneously.

This corrective is an important contribution to the project of connecting subjectivity to the study of IR more generally. Asking “who the subjects of IR are” is important for scholars outside of intervention studies: many critics have pointed out the causes and consequences of the discipline’s orientation towards the perspectives and experiences of the West.¹⁹ Because of the centrality of the Western/modern subject, those outside of this position are relegated to frameworks such as transition, development, and modernisation, which see them in temporally separated levels of development—a development leading to a teleological culmination of capitalism, democracy, and peace. To use Johannes Fabian’s phrase, these subjects are “denied coevalness”—they are imagined as separate units that exists in a necessarily past historical epochs.²⁰

Read in this way, the difference between units is imagined as a temporal lag due to degeneration, something that can be fixed by a return to unity imagined as Western peace, development, and democracy.²¹ By approaching experiences of trying to “catch up with the West” as relevant for the study of contemporary political life, the thesis moves away from pursuing the “diagnosis” of what went wrong on their way to “Western” life and writes these experiences as coeval. The problems faced by my interlocutors are not consequences of belated developments that will be resolved with time, nor are they the expression of mysterious local propensities. On the contrary, they are products of contemporary political life.

iii. Reconsidering liberalism

It is this contemporaneity that forces us to re-consider readings of intervention as a meeting of the modern and the traditional, the liberal and illiberal. As Nadarajah and Rampton pointed out, one of the consequences of the denial of coevalness is the story of the “encounter” between the modern, liberal West, and its traditional and illiberal counterpart. This story is made possible by a number of analytical shortcuts: a belief that the liberalism

¹⁹ Arlene Tickner, ‘Seeing IR Differently’; Sabaratnam, ‘IR in Dialogue ... but Can We Change the Subjects?’

²⁰ Fabian, *Time and the Other*.

²¹ Inayatullah and Blaney powerfully argue this point in their exploration of IR’s failure to treat *difference* as anything else than a degeneration. They particularly draw on Fabian’s work that discusses “the denial of coevalness” that operates in anthropological explorations of “primitive cultures,” and Todorov’s work on difference seen as a degeneration of normalcy. Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* esp. Chapter 3.; Fabian, *Time and the Other*.

in the West and underdevelopment in the Rest are endogenous products of natural qualities, and a teleological narrative of development that centres on “catching up” and “evolution.” In the Balkans, this is usually retold as a tale of the East meeting the West, or sometimes in a slightly more nuanced rendering of the Balkans as a “bridge” or a “meeting point.” On the contrary, the preceding pages have shown that liberalism and illiberalism are contemporaneous. This builds onto existing projects that underscore the co-constitution of liberal and illiberal techniques. It also reconsiders liberalism as a *temporality* and as a *quality*.

In regard to temporality, and along the lines of scholars who have emphasised how the East and the West are co-constitutive,²² the thesis problematised the idea that markets, democracy, and entrepreneurship are radically novel ideas that the Balkans first experienced with the “transition.” On the contrary, these ideas that so strongly oriented international intervention in the 1990s and continue to do so today are built upon histories of experiments with precisely these goals. Qualitatively, the thesis provides a contribution to those studies that argue that liberalism always works through a “heterogeneous character of rule.”²³ Perhaps most importantly, this tells us that any critique of liberal intervention, whether it is democracy promotion, development, statebuilding, or peacebuilding, has to account for contradictory processes that simultaneously nurture freedom and violently silence. Critiques dependent on finding exploitation will be faced with subjects who entrepreneurially embrace liberal freedoms and create pockets of prosperity. On the other hand, critiques that focus on dispersed government that nurtures freedom will be faced with violence, silencing, and exploitation. The power of liberal governance, and the interventions that it inspires, lies in the normalisation of the contemporaneous existence of freedom and constraint. This is a less conclusive, but I believe a more productive venue for critique.

iv. Rethinking governmentality studies

The thesis pushed governmentality studies in two ways: by complicating the success/failure narrative that finds “successful” governmentalisation in societies which operate without “illiberal” techniques, and by embracing the importance of both intent and reception of rule. This approach departs significantly from the IR debates on governmentality that focus on whether governmentality “works,” and on explaining those

²² Collier, *Post-Soviet Social*; Hemment, *Youth Politics in Putin's Russia*; Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism*.

²³ Li, ‘Fixing Non-Market Subjects’, 43. Chatterjee makes the same argument when he describes how “governmentality always operates on a heterogenous social field, on multiple population groups, and with multiple strategies.” Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, 60.

successes and failures. I did not set out to learn about specific phenomena in order to confirm or negate the “theory of governmentality” and accumulate expert knowledge applicable in different places. On the contrary, I set out to learn from events and ask how our new findings could make us reconsider what we thought we knew about governmentality, interventions, or local targets.²⁴ Instead of asking how certain governmental interventions are carried out and how local actors, resistance, and knowledge are used, I asked how we might rethink social transformations through the local.

In doing so, I stopped “looking for” governmentality and its conditions of possibility. Instead, I used the narrative of governmentality as a connection between effects, practices, and programs of improvement to help discern how the solutions to problems of improvement become so normalised that even the questions we ask are narrowly defined. Governmentality in this context translated between the experiences I listened to, the projects of improvement that engaged my interlocutors, and the bigger structural hierarchies that shaped their encounters. Moreover, instead of always pointing to practices that nurture freedom for its targets, it pointed to violence, silencing, and disappearance.

This process uncovers the radical potential of governmentality studies as critique. Governmentality has a unique ability to converse between the micro and the macro, to connect subjectivities and global politics, to complicate the dichotomy between power and resistance. By highlighting how governance happens across scales and how it is always a combination of freedom and constraint, the thesis changes the questions from “looking for” governmentality, to inquiring how the politics of improvement can be illuminated by a focus on the ways that subjectivities are imagined and engaged in programmes of government.

Focusing on effects rather than the success or failure of improvement projects does not make the gap between the intent of the improvement projects and the local reception of these projects obsolete. In Part II, it was very clear that government programmes and practices imagined a particular subject that would undergo a specific transformation. But it was also obvious that the effects of these practices go far beyond these planned fields of action. In making this distinction between government as a scheme and its reality as lived by its subjects, I join ethnographers like Li and Hemment who explore both intentions and receptions of different governmental projects.^{25 26} While I do not argue against those who

²⁴ This line of thinking is pursued in Mitchell, ‘Theory Talks’.

²⁵ Li, ‘Fixing Non-Market Subjects’, 35; Li, *The Will to Improve*, 282.

²⁶ Hemment, *Youth Politics in Putin’s Russia*, 38, 144.

emphasise that Foucault never intended to examine the real effects of government, this foray into the “real life” that Foucault intentionally eschewed is incredibly important.²⁷ First of all, if we remained on the level of intent, we would never include those voices which are already erased. Secondly, we would not be able to make sense of the experiences of these intents that far surpass original plans and the scales we are used to.

v. Ethnography

Chapter 2 defined ethnography as a particular sensibility, stance, or orientation towards the manifold ways in which both the subjects of our research and the researcher herself are made and re-made. This becomes of the utmost importance when approaching improvement projects: they imagine subjects, engage them, scale and re-scale, and determine the ways in which we as researchers reach them. However, despite the important contributions of the ethnographic methodology that are presented in the preceding pages, the thesis also rejects ethnography as having unique access to reality or being *a priori* politically relevant because it “gives voice” to those usually ignored. Others have emphasised that we cannot use ethnography as some kind of claim to “epistemic imperialism”²⁸ or embedded into a universalist ontology which reduces it to a data-collecting tool.²⁹ Because of this, I defined it as a stance, or sensibility, rather than a straightforward method. This stance allows us to question these concepts and our relationship with them, pushing beyond the limits of scalar thinking, intervention, and governmentality.

However, we also cannot imagine that we are “giving voice” to anyone—voice, or agency, is not ours to give. In a recent critique of the (ab)use of anthropology and ethnography in Peace and Conflict studies, this was proposed as the ultimate goal when Philipp Lottholz argues that “giving voice” might replace “objectification.”³⁰ While I agree wholeheartedly with the urgent need of disrupting power relations in research, I fear that assuming that we have the power to give voice might be committing the same mistake we sought to challenge—instead of assuming God’s view, this assumes a God-like omnipotence and an inappropriate political relevance of our research. Moreover, by assuming that we would *want* to give voice to everyone we meet falls in the old trap of romanticising of the local that was discussed in Part I of the thesis.

²⁷ This was addressed in Chapter 2.

²⁸ Dean, ‘Neoliberalism, Governmentality, Ethnography’, 360.

²⁹ Vradi, ‘The Strange Case of Ethnography and International Relations’; Lottholz, ‘Critiquing Anthropological Imagination in Peace and Conflict Studies’.

³⁰ Lottholz, ‘Critiquing Anthropological Imagination in Peace and Conflict Studies’, 22.

Participatory approaches are the best-case scenarios in which we can be politically aligned with our interlocutors.³¹ I was largely unable to find those people. As Chapter 5 and its discussion of the complicated resistance to land deals in Serbia showed, the alliances I found challenged my own politics and forced me to re-examine my expectations and assumptions. Chapter 6 already discussed this by exploring the analytical tension between prioritising experiential critique, and the need to tease apart those critiques with the help of theories and other perspectives. However, remaining sensitive to the politics of location means that these tensions are not *problems* to be resolved, but productive *disruptions*. More than emotionally taxing, these differences were useful for contextualising the different positions that myself and my interlocutors brought to the discussions.

Similarly to Hemment who discussed her collaboration with Russian colleagues and students, I was also preoccupied with the politics of representation (or the anxieties around them) more than my interlocutors.³² While I was afraid of “othering” the Balkans as corrupt or prone to violence, the people I spoke to rarely had such concerns. I was also more likely to examine these processes within global flows and narratives, while the people I spoke to were concerned with what the Serbian state does or does not do, and how that can be influenced by trans-national forces. Perhaps most importantly, just like in Hemment’s discussion of Russia, it was much easier for me to critique processes as the products of capitalism without acknowledging the radical right politics that have in many ways high-jacked anti-imperialist politics in Serbia and Eastern Europe at-large. Explaining these differences helps, rather than hinders the discussion.

Here lie the limits of an experiential critique that would always faithfully follow the analyses offered by our interlocutors. Anthropological discussions, contrary to what we might expect from a discipline so committed to the local, are aware of this. In juxtaposition to a Malinowskian tradition of fieldwork which views the local as knowing, and the anthropologist as the confused outsider, James Ferguson famously wrote that “none of the participants in the scene can claim to understand it all or even to take it all in.”³³ In this world where “everyone is at least a little bit confused,” the question changes from that of who is the insider and outsider—what Chapter 2 addressed as cultural critique—to how different perspectives are made and what they “get” and “miss.” Accepting that the actors’ analyses is

³¹ See Anupamlata and Nagar, *Playing with Fire*; Hemment, *Youth Politics in Putin’s Russia*, chap. 1.

³² Hemment, *Youth Politics in Putin’s Russia*, 38.

³³ Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*, 208.

partial, however, cannot be productive without realising that the scholar's is equally incomplete. In Donna Haraway's famous formulation, "no insider's perspective is privileged, because all drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge are theorised as power moves, not moves toward truth."³⁴ Thus, the curiosity and ambition to know *more* than our immediate experience has to be paired with a humility that reminds us that more is *never complete*.³⁵

Admittedly, the cases where we can be politically aligned with our interlocutors are rare, and even when this is the case, trying to fit our interlocutors into the frameworks of our research and wider academia might be a waste of *their* time. But the added value of ethnography is in pointing out that the least we can do is allow ourselves to be truly overwhelmed by the complexity of human life that we encounter. It is a feeling that should not lead to paralysis or ethical dead-ends, but a feeling that should make us both curious and humble in our research and politics.

vi. Methodology as a recipe and a tension

The above reflection on the possibilities of ethnography as collaboration did not only help me "make sense" of my own positionality and feelings during fieldwork, but it became crucial in trying to write about the people and positions I encountered. Without writing "myself" into the research, this would not be possible. These disruptions are the key driving forces of the thesis.

These disruptions included the challenge of reconciling my expectations with what I found, the juxtaposition between definitions from the literature and everyday understandings, and the anxiety that arose from the failure of the field to conform to the conceptual limitations of my framework. I did not do this only to write "myself" in the text (even though I believe this helped my case for "strong objectivity") but I did so because these disruptions, tensions, and anxieties proved to be the fuel necessary for the analytical work offered in Chapter 6. It is through these disruptions and anxieties that it became clear that the experiences of those intervened upon cannot be subsumed to a study of intervention.

And while I am sure that disruptions happen in all research, I wanted to explicitly state them here to open up space for a more general discussion about the confines of androcentric conceptions of science as always and already knowing. Rather than telling us

³⁴ Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges'.

³⁵ Li, *Land's End*, 17.

“how we must see and what we must do when we investigate,” method can be recast as “slow, vulnerable, quiet, multiple, modest, or uncertain.”³⁶ I hope that one of the contributions of the thesis is to complicate the view of methodology as a recipe unproblematically practiced—not to argue against methodological rigour or consistency, but to argue against the hubris of prioritising concepts and frameworks over experiences.

vii. Post-colonial and decolonial readings of the Balkans

The thesis also presents a specific contribution to post-colonial readings of the Balkans, and discussions on coloniality more generally. First, it advocates for a deeper understanding of how different places are a part of the global system of coloniality even if they are outside of the usual colonised/coloniser dichotomy. And second, it studies how coloniality and difference are translated into everyday geopolitical positionings. By using concepts emerging from post-colonial and decolonial studies—such as administrative rule, colonial difference, and coloniality of power—the thesis shows how this body of literature is relevant even for spaces outside spaces that were directly colonised. Engagement with this literature is crucial for appreciating how forms of rule rely on hierarchies and exclusions. This literature is also invaluable for projects that seek to complicate teleological and linear understandings of social transformations. Importantly, using these concepts reflexively does not negate the specificity of colonial situations and the violence and suffering they wrought, but works to understand how central colonialism is for understanding contemporary constellations of liberalism and illiberalism, freedom and constraint.

More than adding to the study of how this difference is produced between the seemingly liberal West and its illiberal counterpart(s), this thesis pried open the ways in which these hierarchies are translated and start operating on multiple scales both vertically and horizontally. In doing so, it builds onto a small, but powerful body of literature that tackles these issues through concepts of nesting orientalism, self-colonisation, and European and internal difference.³⁷ It investigates how binaries of those deemed improvable, and those not worth investing in, are reproduced in narratives of improvement beyond the intervention itself. This was obvious in ways that young people made sense of inequality, and in visions of agricultural government that depended on one part of producers growing while the other was supposed to silently disappear. More than material inequality, these processes require

³⁶ Law, *After Method*, 4-5, 11.

³⁷ Bakić-Hayden, ‘Nesting Orientalisms’; Razsa and Lindstrom, ‘Balkan Is Beautiful’; Kiossev, ‘The Self-Colonizing Metaphor’; Böröcz, ‘Goodness Is Elsewhere’; Subotić and Vučetić, ‘Performing Solidarity’; Kilibarda, ‘Non-Aligned Geographies in the Balkans’.

the normalisation of this division in government. And the normalisation happens by a complex process of everyday geopolitical positioning that does not stop at state borders. It is this new life of old hierarchies that we have to engage if we are to make sense of contemporary forms of rule.

These oppressions, exclusions and exploitations are not invisible—internal hierarchies produce the lived experience of actually existing liberalism in Serbia. Many in Serbian civil society decry the treatment of Roma, the corrupt business deals, the subhuman treatment of workers that wear diapers because they are not allowed bathroom breaks. We hear about the racist treatment of refugees and the on-going othering and discrimination of Albanian and Kosovar Muslims. Yet, the critiques of these processes turn their gaze to Europe as a solution—as an entity both endowed with and dispensing goodness.³⁸ The same Europe that first gave birth to racial thinking during colonisation is expected to teach others how not to be racist. The same Europe on whose shores tens of thousands are left to die every year is expected to teach compassion. The same Europe that fuelled its development of capitalism with colonial conquest and genocide is expected to teach law and benevolence.

In writing this, I do not want to once again re-inscribe agency to Europe, nor do I aim to point to faulty EU policies. I write this because I want to highlight the devastating effect that the idea of Europe as a sight of goodness has for political imaginaries. This is the Europe that is imagined by youth when they condemn the Serbian educational system. This is the Europe that is invoked when dreaming about huge farms that are worked by drones instead of people. And this is the Europe that has to be tackled as we embark on projects of engaging with non-Western subjectivities. A Europe that hides its own coeval histories of development and dispossession, and its own heterogeneous character of rule. Imagining subjectivities outside these moral geopolitics equates to a denial of their agencies and connectedness.

Moreover, this delusional vision of liberalism and the interventions that promote it are dangerously paired with the emphasis on “stability,” the defining feature of the region in the current international discussions. This vision of liberalism hides its exclusions and ways in which the betterment of human condition was always won through struggle, rather than the teleological march of history. “Stability” precludes any such efforts. Without offering policy advice, it is worth warning about the dangers of these practices that reshape, however

³⁸ I borrow the formulation of “goodness” from Böröcz, ‘Goodness Is Elsewhere’.

imperfectly, politics into projects and paradoxically remove them from the institutions, rather than the everyday.

In the same essay that introduced the concept of European internal difference as a counterpart to colonial difference, Böröcz concludes that within the existing rule of European difference “any attempt at achieving autochthons goodness is futile” —goodness is seen as residing in Europe, and the only progress is imagined as emulation.³⁹ While seemingly removed from practical discussion, the implication of this line of thought is great: there can be no local ownership, there can be no empowerment, and there can be no reformed liberal peace or development without a fundamental rethinking of the ways that colonial difference structures politics in every sense of the word. And the added value of post-colonial and decolonial voices is precisely this fundamental rethinking.⁴⁰

End note

While we are highly critical of expert practitioners who travel around the world, delivering their de-contextualized, seemingly universal knowledge on a particular aspect of intervention, we still remain wedded to the idea that, unlike them, we *can* study a narrowly defined intervention. By paying attention to only intervention, narrowly defined, we can easily lose sight of what is important. Interventions, or improvement schemes, are presented as nothing less than transformation, betterment, increased happiness, or human progress. In an effort to measure and improve, we have broken down these large concepts into smaller units that we can “manage.” This process, while undoubtedly advancing both the scholarship and practices of intervention, is extremely dangerous.

By focusing on that which we can manage, we lose sight of everything else. It is by ignoring the outside of intervention that we can talk about agricultural policy without talking about land, that we can talk about market liberalisation but not wonder what will happen with thousands of semi-subsistence producers in new EU member states, that we can talk about migration as a solution to economic problems that sees people who are migrating as rootless and mobile. It is only by ignoring the tremendous complexity of what remains out

³⁹ Böröcz, 130.

⁴⁰ Once again, this discussion also implies a different understanding of structures and agencies in IR. In short, this is because coloniality of power is ultimately a *structural* explanation but cannot be fully appreciated without the *experiences* of those who are erased, silenced, exploited, and harmed by it.

of sight that we can convince ourselves in our prescriptive authority of knowing what is good for others.⁴¹

Like these experts who would benefit from thinking in a more problem-oriented way, scholars might benefit from pursuing the same path. Being problem-oriented would not imply being suddenly concerned with *how* and *if* an intervention will be successful, but instead pursuing the problem of engaging, and perhaps even improving, the issues we are interested in: whether that is constitutional ordering, security practices, agriculture, or youth participation. Truly starting from a problem would mean staying open to the idea that the intervention itself might not be the crux of the problem, even if it was intervention that originally animated our research.

Perhaps the biggest struggle of this thesis has been the paradoxical realisation that I, like much of the literature I critique, also started from naïvely looking for “intervention.” Yet, the tension between the theoretical limitations of this concept and the politics of improvement I was faced with serve to highlight the potential of thinking *with* and *beyond* an ethnography of governmentality. Such thinking with an ethnographic attention to the experiences of those targeted by projects of improvement does not mean to imply “purer” or “better” knowledge. Paradoxically, it should motivate us to think big to frameworks needed to explain those experiences and remain humble when those same frameworks are challenged by the real world.

⁴¹ Inayatullah, ‘Why Do Some Know What’s Good for Others’.

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